

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

**NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
AND THEIR LESSON FOR US TODAY**

**NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND
POPULAR RELIGIOSITY**

John B. Chethimattam

**NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS WITHIN
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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OF TAMILNADU**

Thomas Manninezhatt

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JEEVADHARA

The Meeting of Religions

**NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
AND THEIR LESSON FOR US TODAY**

Editor:

JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM

Jeevadhara

Kottayam - 686 017

Kerala, India

Tel. (0091) 481. 7430

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	338
New Religious Movements and Popular Religiosity	340
<i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	
New Religious Movements within the Catholic Church	365
<i>Robert L. Fastiggi</i> <i>Charles Stinson</i>	
Nature-Mysticism as the Basis of Eco-Spirituality	390
<i>Wayne Teasdale</i>	
Is a Dialogue with ISKCON Possible?	405
<i>J. Frank Kenney</i>	
Bhakti in the Religious Traditions of Tamilnadu	412
<i>Thomas Manninezath</i>	
Book Reviews	423
<i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	

Editorial

The new religious movements that mushroomed in the 60's and 70's constitute a world phenomenon. Though good many of them are on the decline today, most of them still retain enough vitality to continue the protest they exploded in the face of well established traditional religions like the Catholic Church and Judaism. These are the main sources from which they continue to draw their membership. So we have to study carefully the secret of the fascination they hold especially for young people. There are people who condemn them outright as pure psychological aberrations and have recourse to de-programming techniques to "liberate" their adherents. At the opposite extreme of the spectrum of reactions are those who enthusiastically welcome them as the true standard-bearers of authentic religiousness in our age. In this issue of *Jeevadhara* we endeavour to study some aspects of these new religious movements and their lesson for us today.

The new religious movements and cults cannot be fought by mere negative condemnation. Only by extending proper recognition to the elements of truth captivated in them can they themselves be shown to be irrelevant. Any programme of Christian formation "should emphasize the value of Catholic communion, foster openness and encourage to know the others and provide greater opportunities for sharing of experiences and common action" (Chr. Or., June 1990 p.59). But when over against these actual and basic concerns of people, ecclesiastical authorities constantly harp on law, tradition, ritual identity as if hermetically sealed against other rites, and their own authority to impose them on everyone, Church itself looks an oppressive and alien force. These latter values have to be subordinated to the higher goal of ecclesial communion and shown to be its appropriate celebration. (Unity cannot be a sort of patchwork put over basically disparate "faith versions", but diversity should appear as a creative celebration of one faith, the individual traditions' expressions of the one Tradition of the one Church.

What the new religious movements dramatically declare is that a new order of values has come into the world, or in the

words of the famous sociologist Peter Drucker, that the twenty first century has come to us more than a quarter century ahead of time. The order of colonialism and authoritarianism established on a world scale has seen its end with the break up of the Russian empire. With a deeper realization of the transcendental value of the human person the equality of all human beings has to be recognized. The old order of one man making the decisions and all others obeying is today replaced by the principle that what affects all should be approved by all through a kind of consensus. This is not the age of competition but of cooperation. These are all authentic human values that all religious people and especially organized religions should welcome and accept.

My article on "New Religious Movements and Popular Religiosity" makes a short survey of the methodological and theological principles involved in the cults as expressions of popular religiosity and their lesson for traditional religions, particularly for the Catholic church. Robert Fastiggi and Charles Stinson offer a detailed study of the new religious movements within the Catholic church including Feminism and Liberation Theology which count on religion as power to change society much more than the means of man's spiritual salvation. Frank Kenney makes a critical study of the claims of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.

Even on the spiritual plane there are new religious movements. Prominent among them is eco-spirituality which emphasizes the immanence of God in nature and claims that the traditional insistence on transcendence is escapism shutting out reality. Wayne Teasdale makes a detailed study of this nature-mysticism. Akin to it is the Tamil spirituality emerging out of the Sangam literature including works like *Tolkapiyam*, *Tirukkural* and *Tirumantiram*. Thomas Manninezhath presents a brief study of this spiritual movement.

These are only a few aspects of the new religious movements which can give some idea of the new religious age that is dawning on us. The world has radically changed. We cannot set the clock back, we can only go forward following the guidance of the Spirit of God that leads all humanity to its salvation.

John B. Chethimattam

New Religious Movements and Popular Religiosity

The new religious movements that came into prominence particularly in the 60's and 70's constitute a serious challenge to traditional religions, especially Catholicism and Judaism. The more than 2500 religious groups and sects that mushroomed in recent times drew most of their membership from these highly traditionalist organizations. Their emergence at this moment in history seems to raise questions not only regarding the political, sociological and psychological factors of their historical context but also with regard to the very theological reasons for the existence and vision of the churches. These movements coming from, or at least being sustained by, the mass of common people show what the people are today looking for in their churches. In this paper I shall briefly state the method of approaching these movements, the concerns of popular religiosity underlying them, and the basic theological lessons they present for our age.

Sociologists like Robert Bellah and Charles Glock interpret the new movements as essentially religious. William McLoughlin, the historian, even labelled the years 1960-90 as America's fourth 'Great Awakening'. These movements mark a cultural crisis in meaning in which dominant value complexes such as utilitarianism are being challenged. They mark an increased interest in Oriental mystical ideas including the monistic world view as the really real, and the elements of symbolic continuity between mystical or apocalyptic religion and the 'drug subculture'. There is a resurgence of interest in religion and conservative churches gain more members while the 'liberal' denominations continue to lose members. This is also coupled with the growth of political activism from the part of religions. Though the surge of new movements has

levelled off, and as Martin Marty remarks, by the mid 1980's the new movements have fitted into the wider landscape, still they present a real challenge to theologians and sociologists of religions.

I Methodological Considerations

If one examines the great many books and articles that have been published regarding these new religious movements one can easily see that they have been approached from different perspectives.

Interested views

The most negative evaluation of these movements comes from the "mother" churches they broke off from, as well as the "re-programmed" individuals who left those movements, disillusioned by their recruiting and training methods. Here the main concern is to indicate the various points on which they violate the standard of orthodoxy, the reasons for their "fall" and the ways for bringing them back into the fold. This approach is rather suspect since these religious movements which have existed for a long time in a less visible way became noticed as "new", only when they began to encroach upon the turf of the main line churches. Harvey Cox applying Noam Chomsky's linguistic structural distinction between deep and surface structures reduces the criticism of main-line churches against the new movements into four¹. The recurrent deep structures which these critics use to characterize, caricature and condemn marginal movements are: 1) the subversion myth which paints the new movements as a threat to the civil order; 2) the deviancy myth which finds behind these movements a form of sexual or behavioural deviancy; 3) the myth of dissimulation, that they are "jesuitical" in their approach to outsiders and are taught to dissimulate their real doctrines; and 4) the "myth of the evil eye" that states that no sane person could possibly belong to such movements and that, therefore, the participants in them are involuntary. But these are forms of universal condemnation once used against minorities like Catholics in America. One should discount these assumed criticisms and look more to the "surface character-

ristics" of these movements which are in fact in the terminology of Karl Marx the "cry of the oppressed creature".

At the opposite extreme are the enthusiastic and evangelical descriptions of these movements given by their believing followers². Their main concern is to show how they have been maligned and persecuted by their critics and adversaries. They speak from the angle of a teacher or a follower of the new religion. Obviously this approach also cannot be taken at its face value, but needs critical examination.

A scientific perspective

Then there is the point of view of the scholar or researcher. He looks at these movements as a detached outsider. He evaluates them from the point of view of religious sociology or psychology and at best of comparative religion. Here the main concern is to determine the lineage of the particular movement. The age we live in and the socio-historical context all these new movements and traditional religions as well share will make the historical origin of each movement intelligible. The "dharma lineage" according to which Buddhism judges its various groups and sects, provides an appropriate model for judging the intellectual and spiritual identity of each movement for the investigator as well as for the member. Since there are various schools of interpretation, the school and spiritual lineage of the interpreter are also important.

Then there is the context of the general reader who is not particularly attached in great depth of knowledge to any particular religious tradition or church. For him the new religious movements are positive or negative signs of a fundamental change in society. From the rigid structure of a bygone age in which each one was heart and soul bound to the tenets, traditions and observances of a particular church, we have moved to a new social order of things in which most people are floating agents. They find themselves in supermarket atmosphere where each one can pick and choose what he wants for his spiritual fare. From the point of view of the parents a child's participation in one of the new religions is a break in the spiritual lineage of the family. As in other areas this break with the parental religion is part of the general rejection of parental authority and parental home. In the perspective of the mental

health professional the phenomena of the new religious movements may be taken either as a path of adolescence to adulthood or as a move out of normalcy towards psychopathic illness.

In this objectivist and scientific approach there are two main questions: First comes the question, how did this state of affairs come to pass? Learning from the present how can we formulate a general theory and predict under what conditions such deviations will take place? Secondly, how shall we deal with the present situation itself? What are the generally prevailing conditions that have encouraged religious diversity and fostered inventiveness in the religious realm? How may these different religious movements be integrated into the harmonious co-existence of various religions of humanity?

Here one is confronted with problems of syncretism as well as of attempts to produce a brand new religion as if from scratch. In the former case fragments of several complete traditions are put together without offering people the necessary understanding of what they meant in their original holistic context, or guidance as to what to do with the energy generated by the new knowledge. Liberal education has made all ideas and teachings available to all. But people forget that for certain ideas a definite preparation of emotions and body is required. What happens here is that people are drawn more and more into their thoughts and move away farther and farther from actual life, the life of feeling and natural instinct in which are the most powerful energies of the human being.

In the attempt to produce a brand new religion, one may be carried away by a partial vision, and in rejecting one's past may be throwing away the baby as well along with the dirty water. On the other hand, one may be still dogged unconsciously by some uncritical assumptions of the past. This is evident in the great authoritarianism and regimentation of most of the religious movements, a carry over from the particular faith-imperatives to which they had been subjected in the past. But the widespread questioning of authority in the religious field affects other areas of life as well, political, social and familial. The canons of modern science state that every one can and should know everything, can and should pass judgment on everything, since all information is equally available to all.

A theological perspective

But the new religious movements claim first and foremost to be religions, straight paths to God, new revelations from His side. So to do them justice, one has to evaluate them from the side of God, from the perspective of *theology*. To what extent is their critique of traditional churches valid? How far does it help *fides quarens intellectum*, make faith in God meaningful to human life? Here the criteria of evaluation have to come from theology. A non-religious criterion of religions will subject us, as it has often happened in the past, to the prejudices about religion of a secular culture. A purely secular psychological criterion will regard new religions as deviant behaviour and hence psychotic. An objective criterion wielded by children of Enlightenment tends to end up with purely ideological criteria. Hence the new religious movements have to be evaluated from the theological perspective.

But looking at them from the theological perspective cannot merely be checking how best they conform to the data of divine revelation as presented in the canonical books and the official teaching of orthodoxy. Biblical scholarship has shown that even the books of sacred scripture were written against specific contexts with culturally conditioned theological perspectives. Harvey Cox points out how the creeds and even specific books of the Bible originated against "deviancies", when the Church defined herself against marginal groups.³ St. Mark's Gospel appears to have been composed as a polemic against those who tried to exaggerate the place and role of the Apostles. St. Paul's writings also were composed in a polemical or "definitional" situation. So the theological perspective itself has to be much broader than that of any main line church or group.

For example there is the final criterion of a medium of revelation given by Paul Tillich. For him it is a person, symbol, community or religion that negates what is particular in itself, pointing beyond itself and manifesting what is ultimate. It is clear that Christ did not found the church as it is today. In fact, Christianity began as a reform movement within Judaism, and only much later, away from the center of its origin, Jerusalem, did it become a distinct Church. So

the main concern of the Church should not be to preserve and maintain itself in the status quo, but to achieve its goal and purpose, namely the establishment of God's rule and kingdom in the world and accomplish the mission Christ received from the Father. So the Church should be always open to the new insights that can be gained from the new religious movements.

Similarly to interpret religious movements as related to or even as arising out of a given cultural situation need not be untheological. In fact every theological tradition arose as a response to new and sometimes even threatening cultural situations. Society and its structures are forms of stability that protect us from the ultimate void of existence. When those structures break down in historical and social changes, naturally ultimate questions are raised. Out of the loss of proximate answers ultimate questions grow. The loss of self and identity in modern culture sends people looking for the ultimate basis of their identity. In the preoccupation to manipulate, rearrange and reform the external world modern man has forgotten the inward life of the spirit.

What is called into question is the Western style of theologizing which began with the spread of Christianity in the Greek world. The Greek clear demarcation between the ideal and the material, spirit and matter, reduced the self into its thoughts and made the body something one *has*. Christian theology developed in an atmosphere of the separation of experience from the object of faith. It demanded belief, argument and theology. The new age claims to be one of experience, of immediate contact with the divine. The contrast is clearly seen in the Gospel of St. John where the risen Christ confronts the "doubting" Thomas, who insisted that he would not believe in the resurrection of Christ unless he touched the wounds of Christ. But the official line is placed in the mouth of Christ, who condescendingly satisfies the demand of the disciple: "Thomas you have believed because you saw me. But blessed are those who have not seen and have believed". This statement belongs to a much later stage when many who had not seen Jesus believed in him. But the idea is clear: When the visible presence of the Saviour was no longer available the principle of unity was faith in his teachings and conformity to the common creed. But a

great section of the Church followed the line of Thomas that the experiential closeness to Christ, present in the Church, is the real source of faith. So the crucial question raised once again by the religious movements is how far this experiential approach can keep the Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic. In fact, individual conversions to the new religious groups were seldom based on theological issues. They were more often than not created by psychology and sociology than by theology. People alienated by the impersonalism and dogmatism of main line churches found importance and personal role to play in the new churches. The real theological question is how these experiential needs may be met with in a situation of dogmatic orthodoxy.

The question facing us, in fact, is the meaning and value of the new religious movements as expressions of authentic faith. In the perspective of the divine economy of human salvation and of salvation history there is only one order of things, and that is the order of grace. In that all human beings are called into fellowship in the one Son of God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Hence there is no question of bracketing one's faith in studying the religions. Actually knowledge about the new religions and their interpretation are greatly influenced by personal preferences, attitudes and states of consciousness that the researcher brings into the study. As Abraham Kaplan states the problem for methodology is not whether values are involved in inquiry. Even the claim to no values is itself a value. Only one has to make explicit one's biases

New religions and the sociology of religion

The new religious movements or cults have deeply affected the sociology of religion. To say the least, to a sociologist it is like a discovery of some three hundred new species of lizards for a herpetologist. On the one hand, calling the sociologist to concentrate attention on these movements on the fringe of traditional religion, they tend to trivialize sociology of religion. On the other hand, they radically challenged the secularist tendency of sociologists, by showing the superficiality of secularization. Characterized as they are by politicized evangelism they stimulated a sort of anti-secularization triumphalism. Since secularization is a socio-cultural thrust to enhance religious diversity

the growth of cults is in a sense a product of secularization. Sense of empowerment is the linchpin of religious experience. But this linkage between religion and power was made increasingly in the media and the popular culture and was absorbed into science fiction. "May the force be with you", the Star Wars phrase, is blatantly a religious conception. "The Force" is not a remote power, but close to human beings. If one is in tune with it, one could tap it for enormous personal powers with effects and consequences for life and death.

More important is the focus it places on the capacity or function of religion to supply meaning, integration and identity. When religio-political protest movements such as Moral Majority, Liberation Theology and militant Shiism gained prominence, religion itself was seen as having power. A change took place in religious sociology itself: The sociologists' interpretations of religious phenomena have often been mistaken for their subjects' motives and intentions, and a new "movements' movement" emerged within sociology manifesting 'a symbolic realist' orientation, a willingness to pay considerable attention to the interiority of religious ideation and to examine what religions say about the modern human condition. In earlier studies the attention of sociology was on the organizational aspect of religions, and the cultural element of religious organization and actions was frequently bracketed. Today the focus has shifted to the content of religious meanings and psycho-social dynamics of religions, the dynamics of conversion to and control particularly in the marginal religions.

Here Robert Bellah's discussion of "symbolic realism" is relevant. According to him the only adequate basis for the social study of religion is one that takes seriously non-cognitive symbols and the realms of experience they express. One has to assume in principle that some religions may provide real and adequate answers to questions of ultimate reality. But here again one can make a distinction between cognitive openness and experiential participation. Bellah's cognitive openness keeps one on the detached observer's platform, while experiential participation gives no guarantee against conversion into the new movement. One via media between these two will be to study the new movement as a dimension of one's own faith

experience, where the only challenge is to expand one's own horizon as to include the positive contributions of the new. But new religious movements cannot be properly understood from an adversary perspective. They have to be studied with sympathy. Even if they are erroneous one has to realize that any error subsists only by the element of truth captivated in it. Hence the best way to deal with an error is to recognize and liberate the truth it presents.

II

The New Religious Movements and Religious Pluralism

Origins

If we look for the origins of the new religious movements today their immediate past starts with the Reformation. When religious texts were rare and hidden in monastic libraries one had to follow the lead of the monks and conformity to authority was the rule of religion. But when with the discovery of printing Bible and other religious texts became easily available to common people every one felt competent to judge matters by oneself. Luther's unleashing of the Gospel over against the authority of Pope Leo X was a momentous landmark in the history of religious toleration and the rise of new religious impulses. As Sydney E. Ahlstrom states, the proliferation of new confessional churches "undermined the immemorial view of authority, relativized the idea of dogmatic truth, and opened the way for new religious leaders and disaffected groups to gather constituencies and to institutionalize some new-found consensus". Lutherans, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Quakers and other groups were religious movements within Christianity which ended up as established churches.

Their concerted effort to demagicalize religion and to see an inward, subjective conversion-experience as the chief mark of a Christian led to the rise of modern religious ideas. The American and French revolutions marked a repudiation of the Constantinian tradition of governmental watchfulness over religious realm. The American nation itself showed the largest and most diverse movements of peoples across the globe

and a coming together of diverse confessions living side by side. The "swarming" of Puritans from England in the 1630's indicated a marked shift in the religious policy of the British government, and the same policy of tolerance for religious pluralism was continued in the New World.

To this must be added "denominationalism", the tendency of born-again Evangelicals to recognize as Christian those who witnessed to an experience of God's redeeming grace in spite of disagreements on issues such as baptism and predestination, thus weakening confessionalism. The Transcendental Fellowships that claimed Ralph Waldo Emerson as its leading spokesman, encouraged the formation of ever new groups, based not on dogmas and creeds but on experience. This movement received considerable inspiration and encouragement from the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, whom Emerson glorified as the "Last Father of the Church". Though denounced in his native Sweden as heretical both by Medieval theologians and Cartesian thinkers his writings had a modern ring. They reconciled spirit and matter, body and soul, technology and spiritualism. His esoteric revelations and eschatological doctrines created enormous interest in spiritualism, as a reaction against the humanistic religion that gained prevalence everywhere. Swedenborg's visionary world-view became seminal in a number of healing systems from Christian Science to homeopathy that emphasize the dependence of physical health on the inner level of spiritual well-being.⁷

This spiritualist movement in turn created an anti-denominational reaction in the form of several restorationist movements that emphasized the actual practice of the New Testament Church and discounted the significance of the Old Testament Covenant and of the Jews. Most of them were either syncretic, taking elements from various traditions or sectarians like the Baptists who followed the Puritan impulse, sharply opposed to the Methodists. But there were also "new religions" like the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints based on *Book of Mormon* of Joseph Smith Jr. In 1820 he claimed a heavenly vision of an angel Moroni the son of Mormon and stated that he was singled out as the Lord's anointed prophet for this dispensation. The *Book of Mormon* witnesses to the truth and

divinity of Jesus Christ and his mission of salvation and teaches people to lead simple, industrious, honest and thrifty lives.

Against the ever declining religious enthusiasm new cultic forms of Christian religion emerged in America. Going back to the methods of the Apostles great many People like Charles G. Finney, D.L. Moody, Gypsy Smith and Billy Sunday, and culminating in Billy Graham have used personalism and appeal for a return to the Gospel to heal a world that is a wrecked vessel. Fundamentalism or a literal understanding of the Bible is one of the primary characteristics of this evangelical movement. The Russelite movement which began with Charles Taze Russel in 1870, denounced organized religions, denied the Trinity of God, return of Christ in bodily form, as well as eternal punishment for sinners. The movement assumed in 1931 at Columbus, Ohio the official title of "Jehovah's Witnesses". Pentecostalism was a similar movement which began in 1901 out of various Baptist bodies -as a protest against laxity in the middle class churches. It placed a drastic emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second or third stage of conversion in the life of the believer. The fascination of Mesmerism and the emphasis on the healing mission of the Church produced Christian Science under the leadership of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby who healed Mary Parker Patterson Eddy from her infirmities and made her the leading figure of the movement. These various religious groups and movements had a sort of climax in the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.

The new movements

As Sydney Ahlstrom states "the appearance of many new religious impulses during the 1960's and 1970's can best be seen as a continuation of a venerable tradition, not only because they continue to be formed, but because they also maintain an explicit or implicit social critique".² Most of these groups identify themselves as religious and follow religious and mostly Christian practices. Some of them use a 'born again' expression combined with a charismatic experience. Some form mixed groups of Christians and Jews and others assume teachings and practices of Eastern religions particularly mysticism. All

of them try to stress one or other neglected points of religious faith. I shall mention here only a few of the new religious movements to indicate their general orientation.

Children of God founded by one-time Baptist minister David Berg in 1970 (changed its name in 1978 to the Family of Love), places great stress on family closeness of members. Members by a contract are supposed to turn over all their property to the church, cut all contact with past friends, and carry on recruiting of new members through "litnessing" or distribution of literature of the group. John Robert Stevens founded the Church of the Living Word, making himself the chief intercessor of God, and current revelations the source of his teachings. Elizabeth Clare Prophet along with her husband Mark claiming to be the two witnesses referred to in *Rev.11:3* established Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT). This group believes in re-incarnation and contends that Jesus was a mere human who became christ to serve as a model for others to find christ-presence in each one. The Holy Order of MANS (acronym for Mysteria, Agape, Nous, Sophia) was founded in San Francisco in 1968 by Earl Brighton. It claims to be non-denominational and has for its goal "to create from the individual who seeks this, a happy, joyful, smiling Christian who has attained the true Light and joyous life". (booklet: "Uniting All Faiths" ed. 1973, p.13)

Scientology founded as a new religion in 1954 by L. Ron Hubbard claimed more than three million adherents in 1980. It holds that mind has two parts analytic and reactive, and that each person's real self is a fallen immortal god (Thetan) who has been re-incarnated trillions of years. It endeavours to remove the engrams or sensory impressions of past shock events and liberate the Thetans. The same year 1954 saw the founding of the Unification Church (officially known as The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity) by Sun Myung Moon a Korean who was originally a Presbyterian. He claims that at the age of 16 Jesus appeared to him and gave him the mission. Jesus came to counteract the fall of Adam. To complete that work he had to subjugate Satan by eradicating the root of original sin. But in his short life he was not able to complete this work. Moon's mission is to continue and complete the work of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit and all

the benevolent spirits present in the world. Moon who claims to be the Lord of the Second Advent was destined to effect the physical salvation over and beyond the spiritual salvation attained by Jesus.

World-Wide Church of God was founded by Herbert W. Armstrong in the early 1930's based on the founder's theory of Anglo-Israelism, that the Saxons are the lost tribes of Israel, while Judah represents the Jews who are still under the divine curse. The Anglo-Israelites claimed more than three million followers in England, Canada and other countries. It is based on a very legalistic interpretation of the Bible and of the Yahweh's covenant with Israel. Similarly claiming a special revelation from God was Victor Paul Wierwille who founded the Way International at New Knoxville, Ohio in 1957. The organization is formatted on the symbolic figure of a tree with local fellowships as branches and individual members for leaves.

There are several cults that derive their origin from Indian religions. Thus the Divine Light Mission (DLM) was started in India in 1960 by Sri Hansji Maharaj, whose son Guru Maharajji took from him the leadership of the movement. It conceives the divine as energy and proposes the ultimate goal as merging the human individual soul with the Infinite Absolute. In this the Guru leads and guides the devotees through meditation to enlightenment. Similarly Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada founded Hare Krishna movement formally known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in 1966. Its focus is devotion to Krishna and chanting of his praises for reaching the proper state of consciousness. The members have to avoid alcohol, drugs, meat and fish and even coffee, renounce all worldly possessions. Sri Chinmoy who came to USA from India in 1964 also started his Yoga practice following strictly the Hindu tradition. The Transcendental Meditation of Maharshi Mahesh Yogi which claimed more than a million followers conceives God as a personal Creative Intelligence, and uses meditation as a means for bringing out our own creative intelligence in order to remove ignorance and free oneself out of the chain of births and deaths in the cycle of transmigration.

Challenges of the new religious movements

Though these religious movements appear at certain moments of history and the recent flurry of such movements is somewhat connected with the socio-political turmoil of the 60's and 70's they do point to certain basic issues regarding religion itself. First of all these did not arise primarily out of doctrinal controversies as the heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries of Christianity and the churches of the Reformation. Their emphasis is upon praxis rather than upon abstract theory, upon participation in certain intrinsically valued and stylized activities rather than upon philosophical or dogmatic discussion. This means these movements originate not from the interests of the elite but from the actual concerns of the common people, which traditional organized religions somehow failed to satisfy. What are these concerns?

Secondly, almost universally the adherents of these new movements practise certain stereotyped, repeated, collectively and authoritatively designated and intrinsically valued activities which may be best termed rituals. They assign particular prominence to certain cultic rites such as for initiation, meditation and healing. These do not belong to higher realms of rationality even of mysticism, but to the level of culture and social reality of human life that affect most the life of the common man. One is here reminded of Schleiermacher's definition of missionary work. According to him the task of the missionary is not merely to preach the Christian Gospel but rather communicate to the non-Christian world the values of European culture inspired by the Gospel. So naturally evangelization was often perceived as a cultural invasion of Asia and Africa by the West. Cannot what we find today be said to be a reverse process, a religio-cultural invasion of the West by the values of the East, as well as a backlash from the sub-culture of the common man against the cultural domination of the elite?

Something that is obvious is that the present rejection of the traditional forms of religion is not a denial of religion itself, but rather a more intense search for it. Religion can no longer be defined in terms of a conformity to a set creed. It is

not a question of agreeing or disagreeing. As J. Krishnamurti has often appropriately pointed out what one can agree or disagree readily with is only something familiar and old, something one can recognize. Today the tragedy of man is not that he does not find what he seeks, but rather that he always finds exactly what he seeks and no more. For traditional religion God is one item among many, something along with happiness, honour, wealth, fame and pleasure. A God one can so easily find is no God, but only an idol, a finite deity outside of, additional to and over against the seeker. When searching is based on evaluation and judgment, it is thought that is searching, and it is the search for the known, something which can be recognized. This is why Gautama Buddha objected to all discussion of God as a meaningless discussion, a self-projection as God, an existential heresy. The only thing one can focus attention on is one's searching born out of craving. From there one cannot move in the objective direction, since anything corresponding to it can be only finite, part of the dependent origination that is the finite world. In religion one should move in the opposite direction inwards to the removal of desire through the eightfold path to nirvana, and inner liberation. But then the question arises how one can discover the infinite reality of God in that inner emptiness.

Another dramatic change brought about by the new religious movements is that today religion has come to occupy the centre of human attention. Not more than a few decades ago religion held the most marginal and apologetic place on the fringes of the academy. When the new religious movements challenged the powers that were and the whole existing religious order, religion itself became a lively field of study. It is looked upon with interest and a great deal of suspicion from every side and subjected to strict scientific examination. This means that religion itself is brought down from its transcendental pedestal and brought to the level of mankind's generic cultural experience. As Theodore Roszak says, culture itself is "a splintered mirror coruscating that original splendor into a million variations, all bearing some trace of the divine light, some remote spark or glimmer". In reverse in a certain sense human culture

itself never stops being religious, no matter how secular it becomes.

On the other hand, bringing religion to the cultural level may indicate even the finality of the world's spiritual crisis. "We may now have wandered off after so many lesser reflections of the sacred, we may have lost ourselves among so many fragments, that we can no longer find our way back to the light." For separation of conscience from the spirit is the least examined and the most militantly guarded article of cultural orthodoxy. For, moral passion, the fairest child of religion works most persistently to exile the transcendent energies from our lives. The new religious movements may be an occasion to question the assumptions of our so-called civic religion and secular consensus.

III

The Structure of People's Religion

The new religious movements have brought to the forefront two obvious threats to the religiosity of the common man: On the one hand there is a certain radical polarization among various religious groups dividing the same people into warring camps in the name of God and religion, bringing back the atmosphere of the old religious wars that bloodied the human race from time to time in history. At the opposite extreme is the danger of religious indifference claiming that all religions are at bottom the same, expressions of the same, universal phenomenon of religious experience. Both these approaches and the attitudes underlying them are wrong.

Ninian Smart has described religion as "a six-dimensional organism, typically containing doctrines, myths, ethical teachings, rituals and social institutions, and animated by religious experiences of various kinds". Polarization is the result of the uncritical acceptance of one's own tradition. When a religious tradition tries to hand over what has influenced the lives of its followers often one is not sure whether that tradition is to be identified with a word, a practice, a tenet or belief, a norm of ethical conduct, ritual or transcendental truth. Besides a ritual or practice that was meaningful in a bygone age can become meaningless to the contemporary age. Polarization is the result of the absolutization of one or other of the elements mentioned

above with the belief that that alone can truly mediate the perfect and fullest expression of the Transcendent. Nothing finite can be so absolutized.

On the other hand, religious experience is too complex a phenomenon to be universalized and spoken of in univocal terms. It can belong to the imaginative level of magic and myth, or intellectual level of religious studies or even to the transcendental level of mystical experience. To put them all into one bag is simplistic reductionism. Experience itself may be a groping for the unknown, grasping every blade of grass or grain of sand as it were a ray from the supreme Good, the Sun of the intellectual universe, as for the Greeks. It can also be the immediate contact with the Transcendent which is also immanent in the heart of every being, more intimate than its own interior, according to the Hindu tradition. This radical divergence in the perspective of experience creates also difference in the vision of religious pluralism⁷.

Every religion starts off as if with a bang, as a movement with the overwhelming religious experience of the Founder. A mass of people come to share that experience and then go out to celebrate and proclaim that experience. Rites, narratives, laws, myths, teachings and institutions are just means for making manifest to the world the unique explosion of religious experience witnessed by the Founder. Thus Buddhism started with Buddha's illumination regarding the Four Noble Truths and by proclaiming them he set the dharma wheel in motion. Similarly Mohammed had such an overpowering vision that the veil was lifted from his eyes and his soul for a moment filled with divine ecstasy. Returning to the world of the senses and of time he was able to transform the Arabian tribal structure into a powerful Arabianized monotheism and Arabianized imperium, an all-embracing institution of Islam that burst boundaries of the Arabian peninsula and spread into the whole world. When the movement loses its momentum, the various elements of experience, laws, teachings, morality, ritual, story and myth, become tools to educate the members and keep them in line. Then the religion of the people becomes religion for the people manipulated by an authority almost outside it.

These two orientations of experience represent two models of philosophy itself, one Greek and the other Oriental. Greeks started their philosophical thought from wonder at the uncontrollable and almost hostile outside world, static and immutable in its nature and course. So 'being', the standing up out there was the basic category and model for thought. Change and flux were purely accidental. The whole quest was to discover the immutable *physis*, the immutable nature of things. The object out there defined the action, the action the faculty and faculties the nature of the subject. In the Oriental pattern, represented by the *Vedas* of the Hindus, the point of departure was human consciousness, the inner world of thought and feeling, welling up inside as a powerful stream. It is always ready to break forth into speech and other expressions of human consciousness. Hence life force became the basic category of thought and the model for reality was not something static but a perpetual movement, the cosmic well-spring of all reality. Its most typical expression was sacrifice, a creative process that effects what it intends. Sacrifice is not an action aimed at some pre-existing object, for example placating an outside deity. In fact sacrifice was the primeval creative action, and even the Gods were its children. It is an action that links the acting and its results in a single event. Instead of being something performed by man it fills him, breaks down the boundaries between the religious and the profane, and produces a unity of culture inspired by feeling and conditioned by practical interests.

Popular religion or religion that emerges from the masses follows everywhere the latter pattern of experience. Religion is a spontaneous expression of life itself, its whole weight drawing it back into its own divine source. Sacrifice makes sacred what was thrown out into the world from the divine centre. How each one can find his own authenticity and meaning is the main concern. In the continuity of the flow of time, sacrifice ties the individual and social life itself to tradition. The prescribed ritual, laws, doctrines, stories, morals and myths are all aimed at keeping each one and the whole community authentic and true to itself, and that means focused in the divine source and centre. So ritual itself is not a mechanical and pragmatic gesture, but something with a mystical significance. On this level religion appears as authentic manifestation of

faith, which is after all, a gift of God, substance of things we hope for, a foretaste of the divine reality for all religious traditions.

The greatest challenge posed by the new religious movements to traditional religions including Christianity is to examine critically whether their six-dimensional expression of faith really corresponds to experience of faith itself. According to the basic faith of Christianity, after the incarnation, the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, there is a new world economy of salvation and that is the order of grace. There is no purely natural order. So if one is to accept the good faith and sincerity of the leaders of the new religious movements and their honest, simple, believing followers, one has also to recognize in them an authentic experience of faith. To call them all deceivers or to say that all of them are under illusion will be quite an arbitrary judgment. Where they may be said to go wrong and fall far short of the ideal is in the six-dimensional expression of that faith: The myth they attribute to their founder may be exaggerated, his teachings may not have consistency or completeness, ritual may be faulty, ethical prescriptions inadequate, social institution may be exclusivistic and not catholic, and the magic of his influence may wear out soon. But these are by their very nature to a great extent culturally conditioned, and no religion may absolutize its expressions over against those of others. So the mushrooming of religious cults and groups is an invitation to mainstream churches and traditions to examine critically their cultural expressions of faith that have alienated such groups, and sent them back to the basic experience of faith and to new possible expressions.

Tolerance, Dialogue and Mission

The existence of these new religious movements and groups puts the missionary task of the Church in a new perspective. Mission is no longer a matter of fighting errors. In proclaiming the Gospel one is facing not non-believers but people with genuine faith. Jesus Christ is already present in them, and the Spirit of God at work in their movement. The first task of the missionary is to recognize the work of salvation already initiated in these movements. Evangelizing is not taking the Gospel into a religious vacuum. No one has to import faith from

abroad anywhere in God's world. The work of the apostle is more modest, to support and supplement what the Spirit of God is already accomplishing in the minds of people. So first of all one has to tolerate these new religions as part of the divine economy of salvation. Just like the other more developed world religions, these too provide a great many people with answers for the basic questions of human existence, its origin, purpose and future and other aspects of human life. They are not enemies or adversaries of Christianity but in some sense its partners in the divine work of human salvation. So tolerance of them as well as peaceful coexistence with them is required for a fruitful collaboration.

The next step is a creative and constructive dialogue with these new religions to understand and appreciate their positive contribution and dynamics of their operation by which they are able to exert a great deal of influence on the lives of people. These can to a great extent reveal what is lacking in the Church's approach to humanity. Similarly sharing with them our main concerns and aspirations for the good of the people an atmosphere of collaboration with all forces for the good can be established in serving God's people. This dialogical approach to the new religions will help to appreciate and liberate the dynamic elements of truth that may be kept captive in the midst of a great many erroneous tendencies and assumptions.

But this positive, dialogical and collaborative outlook on the new religious movements will not blind one to their radical defects and drawbacks which call for a critical and missionary approach to them. For all the good done by these movements and the blind spots they have exposed in Church's own life, they are also seriously defective. What these new religions as a whole have done is to bring down religion itself to the level of the prophets. Ignoring the new order of salvation announced by the Gospel as centred in the one Son of God becoming man and recapitulating the whole human history under the one Lord of history, they are proposing a theo-centric kind of religion. Generally they have denied the divinity of Christ and the definitive character of salvation accomplished in him. In his place they have installed a new prophet, Mormon or Sun Myung Moon or some such prophetic figure who has a role similar only to

that of Moses or Mohammed or Buddha. This has to be shown to be wholly inadequate for human salvation, and a trivialization of religion itself.

In Judaism the ideal of salvation was to be an obedient servant of the Law. Law was light and those who obeyed the law walked in the light and were illumined by it while those who disobeyed the law were in darkness. Islam also emphasized shari'a or obedient faith as the condition for final reward as a creature of God. In Buddhism the goal of liberation is to attain illumination like Buddha regarding the nature of human life and reality. Greek mysticism under the leadership of Parmenides and Plato held that the goal of salvation is the attainment of a certain participation in the absolute Good, and for this the Stoics conceived a coming down of the divine in the form of the *logoi*. Christianity confronting the Greek idea of salvation as a sort of divinization realized that this could be achieved only through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, truly the Son of God and truly man. Hinduism had already presented this ideal of salvation as realizing the Divine as one-alone-without-a-second, really real, the ground of one's being and the true Self of one's self. But Christianity placed the essence of this divinization in an adoptive divine sonship in the one Son of God. By that, one is raised to divine fellowship, made to call God, Father, and participate in the activity of the Spirit as the inner principle of one's divine life. What the new religions have denied is the Christocentrism of Christianity.

The basic drawback of the new religions is that the salvation they propose does not go far enough. Though they clearly show the emergence of finite beings from God they do not adequately indicate their final return to him. Even man, the crown of creation remains stranded in the finite realm of his culture. For humanity the model of final fulfilment is marked by the Incarnation, when a member of the human family was able to say: "I am the Son of God". Christ's formulation of human salvation is found in his sacerdotal prayer in the Last Supper: "That all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you: I pray that they may be one in us... That they may be one, as we are one — I living in them, you living

in me — that their unity may be complete" (Jn. 17: 21-23). This conscious participation in the divine fellowship of the Trinity, in and through Christ, the one mediator as truly the one Son of God and truly a human being, is the essence of the Good News Christianity is proclaiming to the world and that should in no way be compromised.

Concluding remarks

When we look at the phenomenon of the new religious movements in general certain basic conclusions seem obvious. In the light of those conclusions one should deal with the movements themselves.

1) The main significance of the new religions is more in the protest they voice against the traditional mainstream churches and religions than in their own positive religious message. The absence of a vibrant faith that influences life and society is the main reason that great many young people leave their mother churches and join the cults. Rev. James J. LeBar states: "The Catholic Church faces a crisis today. In the United States in particular, large numbers of Catholics have left the Church and joined Fundamentalist churches such as the Assembly of God, the Missionary Alliance, or the Seventh Day Adventists. Others have just stopped attending Mass and become inactive. Approximately 40% of young people who join cults are from Catholic backgrounds."⁸ But the main fact is that most of the young people who joined the cults by their own testimony did not have any real contact or deep experience of the faith of their Mother Church. So the conclusion is that the rise of cults and the fascination they hold for the youth is that the Church is not reaching out actively even to its members.

2) A second obvious reason for the influence of the cults is the simplicity of their message. Without going for deep theology and elaborate philosophical discussion of any kind they restrict themselves to a few practical programmes for action, such as faith in God, help for the poor, stricter sexual morality, and whole-hearted dedication to a public cause. Modern society has put a premium on things that work. "The more technology has been able to give explanations for previously unknown phenomena, and bring about new healings

through medicine, the less people turned to the Church to give them the answers they needed."⁹ What people are looking for today is who is doing something to resolve actual problems. As long as the Church does not address the actual plagues and propose action oriented solutions the Church is going to lose its active members to other active groups.

3) A third fascinating aspect of the cults is their militancy. Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moonies and the Hare Krishnas all approach the field on a war footing appealing to the fighting spirit of the common man. Hence ordinary young people who do not have talents enough to excel in science and technology and socially prominent professions find recognition, encouragement and an important role to play in these religious movements. But, as the Moonies have experienced lately, the moment these same young people are sent for higher academic studies particularly in the human sciences their militancy also declines and they settle down into the routine business of a traditional church.

4) According to Mircea Eliade religions establish and support values by formulating cosmologies, which structure space and time, primarily on a symbolic level, but interpreted also in mundane terms. Hence when the structures of society and its values are disturbed and thrown into turmoil new religious movements enter the scene to reimpose the sacral model. Every sacred space implies a hierophany, gods re-entering cosmos to organize the chaos once again. In fact the situation created by the end of colonialism, the independence gained by great many nations, and the East-West confrontation exemplified in the Vietnam war and the confrontation between the super-powers unhinged the world order to a great extent. The new religious movements which marked mostly an influx of Eastern religious values into the West should be seen as a re-entry of the gods into the present chaos to establish order again. In fact this attempt of Eastern religious values to assert themselves is a process almost a century and a half old. Full order can be regained only when the West recognizes the authentic values presented by the East and a common world view is established. Since this is a long way off in the future, the ongoing impact of religious movements also will continue.

5) But most of the new religions and cults have only a short term objective, and their activities and goals are limited to the immediate cultural context of man. Thus the aim of Sun Myung Moon is to extend the spiritual salvation accomplished by Jesus into the temporal realm. The rule of faith for most of the cults is the current revelation of the cult leader. What this shows is that the new religious movements lack depth. This will have a deleterious effect on the religion of humanity itself. The major world religions agree on the fact that man cannot be authentically human without his total openness to God. But this is practically being denied by the new cults. This is a warning to all true believers against the fall-out when these movements eventually fail when their charismatic leaders disappear from the field.

6) The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from a close study of the new religions and cults is that they cannot be fought by mere negative condemnation. Highlighting the doctrinal errors implied in their statements, accusing the leaders of deceit, denouncing them as a threat to society one can create only a persecution complex. In all fairness one has to accept the good faith of these movements, the legitimacy of their protest to the failures of society and of the Churches. Only learning from them the demands and requirements of a true people's religion can the Church make itself relevant for the modern age and accomplish its mission.

Dept. of. Philosophy,
Fordham Univ., N. Y.

John B. Chethimattam

Foot Notes

- 1 Harvey Cox, "Deep Structures in the Study of New Religions" *Understanding the New Religions*, ed. Jacob Needleman & George Baker, New York: The Seabury Press, 1981, pp 122-30.
- 2 See for example, Young Oon Kim, *Unification Theology*, New York: The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 1980, *Exploring Unification Theology*, ed. M. Darrol Bryant & Susan Hodges, New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, 2nd ed. 1978; Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, *Planting the Seed*, Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1982

3 L. C. p. 19

4 "From Sinai to the Golden Gate: The Liberation of Religion in the Occident" *Understanding the New Religions*, pp. 3-22

5 See Emmanuel Swedenborg, ed. & trs. George F. Dole: New York: Paulist Press, pp. 1-33

6 Ahlstrom, I. C. p. 19

7 Reasons for religious pluralism are many. At one extreme are those who hold that any religion is 'whatever its followers define it to be. "Christianity and Judaism, therefore, are said to consist of whatever those who call themselves Christians and Jews practise as religion." (See Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods, Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1979. But others find 'ground for pluralism in the very inadequacy of human thought and systems to represent and express the ineffable divine reality.

8 See Rev. James J. LeBar, *Cults, Sects and the New Age*, Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Publ. 1959; Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis MN Bethany House Publs. 1965, 77 and 85. These take a rather very negative view of the new religions. Martin says, "Each cult has what might be called its own belief system which follows a distinct pattern, and allowing for obvious differences of personality which exist in any group, can be analyzed and understood in relation to its particular theological structure" (p. 25).

9 Peter Rowley, *New Gods in America, An Informal Investigation into the New Religions of American Youth Today*, New York: David McKay, 1971. "Often immediate conversions, as well as universal causes have popularized a sect." He gives as examples the Beatles' interest in Maharishi, Allen Ginsberg's chanting of the OM, and Timothy Leary's taste for the East. He quotes Margaret Mead's statement that what the world needs today is "a religious system with science at its very core".

New Religious Movements within the Catholic Church

Introduction

The Catholic Church is considered by many to be a very conservative and traditional religious body. However, with membership now over 900 million and with large representations on every continent, it seems inevitable that within the Catholic Church there will be diversity and novelty. Such indeed has been the case, especially within the last 25 years since the closing of Vatican II. The purpose of this article is to sketch four significant developments within Catholicism which can be considered as "new religious movements". The first two movements to be considered are the Dialogue with Non-Christian religions and Liberation Theology. Both of these movements have developed within the Catholic community and have received support (albeit cautious) from the Vatican. The other two that will be considered — Feminism and the "New Age Movement" — are more the result of outward currents flowing into Catholic circles causing transformations and critiques of existing Catholic practices and values. In the case of Catholic feminism, there is an undeniable influence of the secular feminist movement. Thus some attention must be given to rise of feminist thinking which has taken place in the West. In the case of the "New Age Movement", we have a blending together of diverse elements which can be linked to various strands of Gnosticism, theosophy, popularized Vedanta and contemporary ecological concerns. Thus, it will also be necessary here to provide some historical background.

It is hoped that by this overview of these four new religious movements within Catholicism — interreligious dialogue, liberation theology, feminism and New Age spirituality — some sense of the diversity and vitality that exists within contemporary Catholicism will be gained.

Dialogue with World Religions

One of the most powerful new movements within the Catholic Church is the growing interest in Non-Christian religions. While there were isolated Catholic scholars of Non-Christian religions prior to Vatican II, the Council seems to have launched an almost unprecedented fascination with Oriental religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism. What is most remarkable about this new religious movement is how it has achieved popularity not simply among specialists and scholars but among ordinary lay people and religious as well. It is not unusual for Catholic monks or nuns to attend seminars on meditation and yoga. Catholic high schools, colleges and seminaries regularly offer courses dealing with world religions. There have even begun several "intermonastic hospitality programs" which allow Buddhist monks and nuns to live in Catholic monasteries and convents and Catholic monks and nuns to spend time living among their Buddhist counterparts¹. How do we explain this growing interest in Non-Christian religions on the part of Catholics? Is it the result of the Council alone? Or is it a reflection of a spiritual hunger for a type of intimacy with the sacred that conventional forms of Catholicism do not supply?

Certainly, there are many factors at work in this new movement within Catholicism. In previous epochs, the Church also had to deal with the assimilation of wisdom from Non-Christian sources. In the Patristic Age, it was the creative dialogue with Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism. In the medieval era, it was the encounter with Aristotelianism. In more recent years, it has been the dialogue with secularism and other offsprings of the Enlightenment. The last several decades have also witnessed an unprecedented growth in world communications. It is almost impossible now to live in isolation from people of other faiths, languages and cultures. Vatican II tried to address the reality of the modern world with its ever-present pluralistic context of references. In several key documents like *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Nostra Aetate*, the Council explicitly sought to clarify the Church's position regarding Non-Christian faiths.

Probably the most remarkable of the conciliar statements is that of *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relationship of

the Church to Non-Christian Religions. While not going into any depth on the particular tenets of the Non-Christian faiths, this document does acknowledge that there is truth and holiness to be found in these traditions, and specific mention is made of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. While upholding Christ as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), the declaration openly admits that these other religions "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (sec. 2).

Though *Nostra Aetate* was quite polite and cautious in tone, the post-Conciliar reaction was perhaps unexpected. It was as if approval was given to any form of interreligious exploration. An explosion of publishing ventures were launched in the West designed to open the windows of the Occident to the mystical winds of the East. New heroes of interreligious dialogue emerged. Father Raimundo Panikkar, born of a Hindu father and Spanish mother, began writing bold and provocative works like *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man* (1973) and *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (1979). A renewed interest developed in the various attempts at the indigenisation of the Christian faith in Chinese and Indian cultures. Although such attempts can be traced back to sixteenth century Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili, they had never received full Vatican support. The Council, though seemed to give a type of endorsement to experimental monastic communities like Shantivanam, a Christian ashram founded in the early 1950's by two French Benedictine monks, Jules Monchanin and Henrile Saux. This Christian ashram continues to thrive in South India under the English monk, Bede Griffiths, who, along with Panikkar, is one of the leading proponents of a new Catholicism which is 'totally Indian and totally Christian'.

The implications of this new movement within Catholicism are threefold: cultural, theological and pastoral. On the cultural level, the impetus now is to discover new and creative ways of expressing the Catholic faith which affirm and incorporate the indigenous customs and traditions of the local populations. While some of these efforts have received ecclesiastical approval, many bishops are extremely cautious if not suspicious. Progressives argue that the Church must transcend her Eurocentric posture and allow for fuller and freer

expression of various Asian, African and Latin American customs. Some have even begun to include Non-Christian writings as part of liturgical celebrations since these writings should be understood as authentic preparations for the Gospel². The future will indicate to what extent ecclesiastical authorities will encourage, restrict or even terminate such attempts at indigenisation.

The theological arena has also become highly controversial in regard to interreligious dialogue. While Vatican II can be correctly understood as a move away from exclusivism towards inclusivism, some Catholic theologians like Paul Knitter, Rosemary Ruether and Gregory Baum have argued that it is imperialistic to argue for Christian uniqueness and supersessionism. Knitter, a former Divine Word missionary, is the co-editor, along with John Hick, of a book entitled, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (1987). Knitter is also the author of an earlier work, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes towards the World Religions* (1985). While Knitter has his supporters, he has also been criticized for undermining Christian missionary efforts³.

The theological question is how and to what extent can Catholic theology affirm and incorporate the valid insights of Non-Christian traditions without abandoning the uniqueness and universality of Christ. Gavin D'Costa, a young theologian of Goan descent who teaches in England, argues in favour of the inclusivist paradigm by making ample use of Karl Rahner's Christology and anthropology⁴. As D'Costa observes: "This inclusivist position intelligibly reconciles and holds together the axioms of the universal salvific will of God and the axiom that salvation comes through God in Christ in his Church"⁵. José Pereira, an Indian Catholic and a specialist in Hinduism, believes that the supernatural character of the truths found in non-Christian traditions might indeed be given official recognition by the magisterium of the Church. As he writes: "It seems to me that Catholic thought, since Vatican II's Declaration of the Church's Relation to non-Christian Faiths, is moving irreversibly in the direction of the sifting and the authentication of non-Christian insights, and that the Church will eventually see her way to assuring us of their divine origin"⁶.

The hierarchy of the Church has officially adopted the inclusivistic paradigm in its efforts to promote interreligious dialogue. Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical letter, *Ecclesiam Suam*, makes it clear that Christians cannot look upon all religions as being of equal value. However, the pontiff states that "we do, nevertheless, acknowledge with respect the spiritual and moral values of various non-Christian religions, for we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, teaching and education, social welfare and civil order"⁷. Pope Paul's commitment to this philosophy was exhibited during his visit to India in 1964 when he quoted the famous text from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*: "From the unreal lead me to the real; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality."⁸ Supporters of religious pluralism, however, argue that it is impossible to do genuine dialogue within the inclusivist paradigm, since one is always assuming an air of religious superiority⁹.

The pastoral implications of this new movement of interreligious dialogue are many. Efforts have begun and should continue to be made to educate the faithful on the basics of the various religions of the world. Catholic universities should be encouraged to conduct research into the history of religions making use of the best scholarly tools available. The outstanding achievements of Catholic scholars like R. C. Zaehner, Etienne Lamotte and Louis Massignon should be held up as models of how it is possible to do objective research into religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam without abandoning the Catholic faith.

As much as possible, people from the indigenous cultures should be encouraged to develop their own Catholic theologies which reflect their own particular creative insights. After all, people like Jules Monchanin, Henri le Saux and Bede Griffiths are Europeans who moved to India. Perhaps a better model to follow would be the great Brahmin convert, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907), who was able to authentically incorporate his background as a Hindu sannyasi into the mystical and ascetical depths of the Catholic faith¹⁰. Just as Christian Patristic writers were able to make judicious use of Neo-Platonic and Stoic sources, so also must Indian, African and

Chinese Christians draw upon the rich resources of their own native traditions.

The pastoral issue now being faced is the direct incorporation of Non-Christian rituals, symbols and prayer forms into the spiritual lives of the faithful. On Oct. 15, 1989, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation". Although the general tone of the letter, as is usual with that of Church documents regarding interreligious dialogue, is cautionary, it does point out that various methods of prayer should not "be rejected out of hand simply because they are not Christian". However, the letter makes it clear that "one can take from them what is useful so long as the Christian conception of prayer, its logic and requirements are never obscured (sec. 16)¹¹".

Liberation Theology

For the last two decades, the movement known as liberation theology has become increasingly popular, familiar and controversial within the Catholic Church. As an identifiable term, liberation theology rose to prominence with the publication of *Teología de la liberación*¹² in 1971 by the Peruvian priest and theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez. Other Latin American theologians who have become associated with the movement are Juan Luis Segundo, S. J. of Uruguay, Leonardo Boff, O. F. M. of Brazil and Jon Sobrino of El Salvador. Many other names have also been linked with liberation theology including Dom Helder Camara, former archbishop of Recife, Brazil and the Nicaraguan poet turned politician, Ernesto Cardenal, S. J. Although liberation theology is most frequently identified with Latin America, it also has its adherents — Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant — in Africa, Asia, North America and Europe. In South Africa, the theologian Allan Boesak and Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu have preached the need for liberation from the sin of racism. In Sri Lanka, Aloysius Pieris, S. J. has spoken of the need to transcend the imperialistic overtones intrinsic to claims of Christian absoluteness. In North America, feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether have applied the themes of liberation theology to the struggles faced by women, and in Europe theologians, like Johannes B. Metz, have developed a

“political theology” which calls upon the Church to become “an institution of social criticism”¹³.

Liberation theology emphasizes a number of important themes. The first and most important is the need for a preferential option for the poor on the part of the Church. Drawing upon the scriptural witness of the book of Exodus, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the book of Revelation, theologians of liberation recognize an unquestionable affirmation of God’s love and concern for the poor and God’s condemnation of all forms of injustice, slavery and oppression. Liberation theology calls upon members of the Church to live in solidarity with the poor and to join in their struggle for liberation from the injustices of poverty, marginality and structural violence.

Another central theme of the theology of liberation is the demand for theology to move beyond a purely intellectual exercise into the realm of praxis. Gutierrez talks about the need to transcend an exclusive emphasis on orthodoxy and to reaffirm the need for orthopraxis. As he writes: “the intention is to recognize the work and importance of concrete behaviour, of deeds, of action, of praxis in the Christian life”¹⁴. For many liberation theologians, this also requires a critical analysis of social and economic structures which oppress the poor. When confronted with the horrible face of poverty in its most drastic forms, liberation theologians demand to know why some people have an abundance of wealth while so many others lack even the necessities of food, clothing and adequate shelter.

One of the most controversial aspects of liberation theology is its use of Marxist analysis in determining the causes for economic and social injustice. Gutierrez speaks of contemporary theology’s “direct and fruitful confrontation with Marxism”, which has led to a searching with its own sources for reflection on “the meaning of the transformation of this world and the action of man in history”¹⁵. The Vatican, however, has been somewhat circumspect about this use of Marxist analysis. Indeed, in its 1984 “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation”, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith warns that Marxist currents “continue to be based on certain fundamental tenets which are not compa-

tible with the Christian conception of humanity and society"¹⁶. Theologians like Boff, however, have replied that authentic liberation theology "uses Marxism purely as an instrument" and "does not venerate it as it venerates the gospel"¹⁷. Moreover, liberation theology "maintains a decidedly critical stance in relation to Marxism"¹⁸. While Marxism might be used as a tool, it can never be the final word since Christ is the true teacher (Matt. 23:10). Thus, Boff argues that "Marxist materialism and atheism do not even constitute a temptation for liberation theologians"¹⁹.

Flowing from its emphasis on praxis, liberation theology seeks to apply the fruits of scholarly analysis on a pastoral and practical level. Here the need is to be in solidarity with the people. As Boff writes, liberation theology is meant to be "the theology of the people"²⁰. For some theologians like Gutierrez this means choosing to live in the same conditions as the poor. The liberation theologian is not meant to be a paternalistic agent who has all the answers but rather a listener and a participant in the struggle for justice and freedom. In many places in Latin America, base Christian communities (*comunidades de base*) have been established in which the Bible is studied and the local situation is evaluated in the light of the Gospel message. In terms of ecclesiology, liberation theology has called upon the Church to become the "sign and instrument of liberation"²¹. As Boff writes: "the best way of evangelizing the poor consists in allowing the poor themselves to become the church and help the whole church to become truly a poor church and the church of the poor"²².

The Vatican has been very supportive of the idea and practice of commitment to the poor as well as the evangelical counsel of poverty, but has also warned that the concept of the "Church of the People" should not challenge "the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church, willed by the Lord Himself"²³. On March 20, 1985, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released a "Notification" of several reservations concerning a book by Leonardo Boff entitled *Church, Charism and Power*. This document warns of Boff's views regarding the structure of the Church, the permanence of dogmatic formulations, the exercise of sacred power and the role of pro-

phhecy within the Church. While acknowledging the "good intentions" of Boff, the text warns that all prophetic utterances must accept the authority of the hierarchy of the Church and "cooperate positively in the strengthening of internal communion"²⁴. Subsequently, Boff was ordered to observe a period of "respectful silence" in order to reflect upon the criticisms of his work. This he observed with a "religious spirit"²⁵.

Another controversial aspect of liberation theology is the question of involvement in the affairs of secular politics. Gutierrez writes that "in today's world the solidarity and protest of which we are speaking have an evident and inevitable 'political character' insofar as they imply liberation"²⁶. He goes on to say that the protest against oppression runs great personal risks — even to one's own life. Gutierrez's words have proven to be prophetic. In 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador was assassinated because of his criticism of the government. Later that same year, four American women missionaries were raped and murdered in El Salvador. In 1989 six Jesuit priests, along with their house-keeper and her daughter, were executed in that same war-torn country.

In the light of such violent repression, it is not surprising that some theologians and clergy have felt the need for overt support of political revolutions that can overturn unjust regimes. One notable example is the Jesuit priest, Ernesto Cardenal, who renounced his previous pacifism to support the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua during the late 1970's. When the revolution succeeded in 1979, he became the country's Minister of Culture. The Vatican, however, warned him that it was not appropriate for a member of the clergy to hold political office.

The fear of the Vatican is that the political dimension of liberation theology might lead to "a temporal messianism, which is one of the most radical of the expressions of the secularization of the Kingdom of God and of its absorption into the immanence of human history"²⁷. The Vatican also fears that liberation theology could lead to a de-emphasis on the traditional soteriological and eschatological dimensions of liberation from sin through the power of divine grace. Perhaps in the light of such criticisms, Boff has recently acknowledged that there are certain temptations that liberation theology must overcome

including the overstressing of the political aspect, the disregard for mystical roots and the subordinating of "considerations of faith to considerations of society"²⁸.

An assessment of the impact of liberation theology on contemporary Catholicism must acknowledge two realities: 1) that liberation theology as it exists today is largely an outgrowth of historical nourishment and support from within the Catholic tradition; and 2) that the reservations given by the Vatican should in no way be understood as a rejection of the essential tenets of liberation theology.

The historical roots of liberation theology can be traced back to the biblical witness of God's love and vindication of the poor found in so many writings from both the Old and New Testaments²⁹. Church Fathers like Ambrose and John Chrysostom can be used as support for the need of solidarity with the poor and the suffering. The medieval witness of St. Francis to the importance of voluntary poverty is likewise very much in harmony with liberation theology's emphasis on "the Christ of the poor".

Most liberation theologians do acknowledge inspiration from sixteenth century Catholic defenders of the rights of the Indians like the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas and early bishops like Antonio de Valdivieso of Nicaragua and Juan del Valle of Columbia³⁰. They also are ready to acknowledge the importance of the social encyclicals of the popes, especially *Mater et Magistra* (1961) of John XXIII and *Populorum Progressio* (1967) of Paul VI. The impact of Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) is also considered to be a major turning point towards the direction of liberation theology. However, most Latin American liberation theologians point to the second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM II) held in Medellin, Columbia in 1968 as the "birthday of Latin American liberation theology".

It is probably fair to say that the Vatican has supported the ideals of liberation theology but has sometimes felt the need to issue warnings regarding methods and theological implications. In more recent years, however, the pope has clearly placed himself on the side of ecclesial solidarity with the poor. His 1988 encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, shows that the

pope is willing to criticize the evils of liberal capitalism as well as Marxism. In his visit to Mexico in May of 1990, the pope was quite open in his warning to the business community of Durango that recent events in Eastern Europe should not be understood as "the triumph of the liberal capitalist system"³¹. However, the pope makes clear that the church cannot remain on the level of social criticism. Thus, the pontiff calls upon experts in the fields of economics and politics "to carry on the search for valid and lasting solutions that may guide human processes toward the ideals proposed by the revealed word"³².

Liberation theology is one of the most dynamic and important movements within contemporary Catholicism. Since the Vatican has given open support to an orthodox form of liberation theology, it is safe to say that it will become an enduring feature of Catholicism in the future. The chief question, though, is whether the role of prophetic witness will be sufficient to convert those who possess political and economic power to live out the ideals voiced by the theology of liberation. Will the church become a persecuted minority within countries that do not welcome social criticism? Or will members of the church accommodate themselves to a peaceful coexistence with the structures that produce poverty and oppression? Only the future will tell.

Feminism and Catholicism

Prior to the era of the French Revolution there was little or no explicit feminism in the sense of any systematized theorizing about the need to liberate women and permit them to fulfill themselves freely, achieving equality with men in all the arenas of public life. From ancient and medieval times, there have, of course, been unusual women, often powerful monarchs—Isabel of Castile, Elizabeth Tudor and Catherine de Medici—or the occasional author, Sappho and Hypatia of ancient Greece and Renaissance noblewomen like Christine de Pisan and Marguerite, Princess of Navarre. However, from the seventeenth century on, one finds distinguished women authors: Aphra Behn, the English playwright, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, the Mexican nun and poet, Anne Bradstreet, the New England Puritan poet and Mme de Sévigné, the French correspondent and essayist.

These women were followed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a large and growing group of women authors: Mme de Stael and Georges Sand in France, and Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters in England. Without exception, these women were either single or, if married and mothers, they were women of sufficiently high social rank to free them from the more routine domestic duties and burdens.

Women authors in the Church were rare before the medieval period. There were well-known women: Basil the Great's sister, Macrina, Augustine's mother, Monica, Constantine's mother, Helena, Eustochium and Paula, the friends of Jerome, and Benedict's sister, Scholastica. However, these women left few, if any, writings of their own. A striking exception is Egeria, a Spanish Abbess, who wrote a *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* in the seventh century. In the same century, there is also the great Hilda, Abbess of Whitby in northern England, who is praised by the Venerable Bede. Unfortunately, though, none of her writings are extant.

It is not until the rise of the great noblewomen-abbesses of Rhineland Germany in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries that we begin to see large-scale doctrinal writings done by gifted women: theologians and visionaries like Hildegard of Bingen, Gertrude the Great and Mechthilde of Magdeburg, and even earlier, in the tenth century, there was the remarkable poet-dramatist, the Abbess Hroswitha. However, this developing feminine stream of theologizing ended when the de-centralized monastic schools for nuns as well as monks were replaced by the new centralized urban schools which quickly developed into the medieval "universitas" organized around the male-guild-pattern. The new university excluded women, even the most learned. From that time on, women, kept out of academic theology, had to express themselves in writings of a more charismatic or prophetic sort. This writing was not done as "official theology" which belonged to men but as obedience to God who at times chooses "weaker" women to instruct men. This is the rubric used by all the leading female Christian authors from the late medieval times until fairly recently: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Genoa, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux and others.

During this whole period, the ordination of women was simply inconceivable. When it was mentioned, it was declared to be intrinsically invalid. It formed no part of the biblical tradition, and Greek philosophy held that women were biologically inferior to men which made them naturally subordinate to men in social circles. Hence, as Aquinas argues, women cannot mediate sacraments to men, though individual women can surpass individual men in sanctity. The leading Protestant Reformers simply carry on these biblical and classical viewpoints unchanged. Given the state of medicine and reproduction in those centuries, the subordination of almost all women, with the rarest exceptions, was encoded into the basic structure of society and the Church. Commonsense could see the rationale for it in nature itself.

It is only in the wake of the French Revolution that things began to change here. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her polemic *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1791, asking that *egalite* be extended to include the genders as well as socio-economic classes, a demand that shocked even the revolutionary males of the day. In New England, the scholar-editor Margaret Fuller published her treatise *Women in the Nineteenth Century* in 1844, discussing both the prospects for women's social and cultural advancement in a male world and also the improvement of men. Women enlisted in the Abolitionist Movement against slavery and in the Temperance Crusade against alcohol. Women in Protestant Churches organized female auxiliary groups which began to have real intra-ecclesial power in the pastoral sphere. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, women had largely won the right to vote either by a simple change in legislation in most countries or by an Amendment to the Constitution in the United States.

In the aftermath of that victory, however, very little changed for women in the balance between public and private lives. Women still had to choose, unlike men between career and marriage, and many elite private universities still excluded women who had to go to "women's colleges". Significantly, the novelist-essayist-social critic Virginia Woolf was married but childless when in the 1920's she wrote her often cited essay, *A Room of One's Own*, on the need for women's independent

intellectual and artistic self-development beyond male control.

The domestic and military needs created by World War II in the 1940's brought women back in large numbers into the public arena, but with the end of the War and the 1950's women were sent home to resume domestic life and motherhood once again as their full-time vocation. They were to make room for their returning men. Thus, in 1949, the French Existentialist philosopher and novelist, Simone de Beauvoir wrote her now classic study, *The Second Sex*, an analysis of the seemingly immutable subordination of women to men, the First Sex, and to men's needs and wishes.

It was in the new American middle class order of Suburbia that in 1962 Betty Friedan, a married woman and mother and the founder of contemporary American Feminism read de Beauvoir and then wrote her own epoch-making book, *The Feminine Mystique*¹¹. This was a lengthy attack on the then dominant view of women as exclusively passive, emotional, nurturing and relational beings who were by nature properly subordinate to the more independent and rational male. Friedan rejected this view (termed the "Feminine Mystique") which held that women were to center their lives on emotional experience, on motherhood, on nourishing domesticity and the private sphere as their appointed destiny.

Her book struck a nerve in many thousands of middle class women and sparked contemporary American Feminism as a revolt against male rule or 'patriarchalism'. It became a charter for younger women to search for freedom to pursue careers of any sort they wished. An active, independent career in the world became the feminist goal during the late 1960's and 1970's. However, not all women became feminists. Many religiously and politically conservative women, led by polemicists like Mrs. Phyllis Schlafley, rejected Friedan's feminism as "mannish", unnatural and even "anti-family".

Nevertheless, the movement grew into a very large one on the middle and upper-middle class level and generated organizations like NOW, (the National Organization of Women). Theoretical disputes developed: emphasising vs. deemphasising the differences between women and men and the acceptance vs. rejection of the male-competitive model for career and life. There

also developed the problem of "Having It All" — a successful professional career combined with a nurturing marriage in private life — and the related problem of the "Superwoman" who was supposed to excel in all areas of her life but instead frequently "burned out". And there were still other difficulties: the unintended side-effects of the widespread abolition of Alimony in so-called "no-fault" divorces. These often left the divorced woman in financial hardship, especially if she received the custody of the children.

By the mid 1980's Feminism had entered into a state of internal argument and stasis. This was aggravated by demographic worries about a "birth dearth" of middle class people, the defeat of the Feminist Equal Rights Amendment by anti-Feminist women led by Mrs. Schlafley, and most recently, by the angry political debate on abortion rights vs. fetal rights which has divided Americans as few previous issues have. Feminists now find themselves on one or the other side of this tragic moral issue.

The Catholic Church, like other Christian communions, has not, of course, been unaffected by post-Friedan Feminism. Women have increasingly contributed their perspectives and thinking to ecclesiastical documents, including those produced in the Catholic Church. Women were once rarely found in theology and religious studies as professional fields. Prior to the 1960's there was but a handful of such women scholars: Jane Ellen Harrison in ancient Greek religion, Evelyn Underhill in Christian mysticism and Georgia Harkness in systematic theology. They and a few others like them were gifted free-lance writers kept out of the male-dominated faculties or at the margins of academia. But today women participate more and more fully in theological scholarship, in research, writing and debate: Monika Heltwig and Elisabeth Shüssler Fiorenza in theology, Pheme Perkins in biblical exegesis, Jill Raitt and Jane Dempsey Douglass in historical theology, and others. Women have also had a decisive impact in reducing, where possible, exclusive use of masculine nouns and pronouns in public liturgical documents, rendering the language of official church worship more gender-balanced and less "sexist".

The key and dramatic issue for many Churches, especially the Catholic Church is, of course, the question of women and

Holy Orders. In the early nineteenth century, Margaret Fuller noted that women were accepted as preachers or leaders among the Quakers and in a few other small groups. But she did not venture to predict the same phenomenon in any of the mainline Churches. Yet by the first quarter of the twentieth century, certain liberal Protestant denominations — Congregationalists, Northern Baptists and Methodists — had begun ordaining women, though on a small scale, and usually employing them, in effect, as catechetical assistants to male ministers and chaplains. But more conservative Protestant denominations, notably the Southern Baptist Convention, citing Paul's ban on women speaking in churches, have continued officially to oppose women's ordination as "unscriptural". By the 1960's, however, some liberal Lutheran Churches in Europe and America were ordaining women to the ministry. The Episcopal Church — the American branch of Anglicanism — followed suit in the 1970's. Great controversy was generated in Anglican circles by these ordinations of women as priests, and then, in the late 1980's by the first consecration of a woman as bishop. Women's ordination to the priesthood is still blocked in the Anglican Mother Church, the Church of England.

In the Catholic Church, advocates of women's ordination have been active since the 1960's and have received some support from well-known theologians, most notably the Jesuit Karl Rahner who sees only ancient socio-cultural factors and ecclesiastical custom rather than "Divine Law" involved in the question³⁴. But Catholic conservatives and traditionalists counter that "Divine Law" is involved. For the most part, however, contemporary Catholic traditionalists content themselves with arguing from the male-only precedents of Scripture and Tradition. Currently, under Pope John Paul II, the Vatican strongly favours the conservative and traditionalist view. Progressive Catholics, including some European and American bishops have, then, limited themselves to asking: if, in the light of the current shortage of celibate male priestly vocations, women might possibly be permitted into all other ecclesiastical positions — including the Diaconate — below the priesthood³⁵.

Beyond the particular issue of women and ordination, one has to distinguish between several strands of Christian Feminism. There are "reformist" women in the Church like

Monika Hellwig and Elisabeth Shüssler Fiorenza³⁶ who basically accept the Church's pastoral structure and wish to work within it, modifying its gender-balance and rendering its exercise of authority more flexible and cooperative³⁷. There are also more radical feminists who, like Rosemary Radforth Ruether³⁸, wish to replace the hierarchical structure with something new and entirely egalitarian. Finally, there are extreme radical feminists like Mary Daly who are ex-Christians³⁹. They have abandoned the entire biblical tradition as intrinsically "patriarchal" and "sexist".

Despite the fears of some conservatives — like Anglican Fr. William Oddie and others who think Feminists will "destroy" biblical religion and eclipse "God" in a feminized paganism⁴⁰ — it seems most probable that the vast majority of Christian Feminists will prove to be reformists who wish not to replace but to participate more fully and equally with men in the historic institutional Church.

Catholicism and the New Age Movement

In Western Euro-American religion there have always been small, intense groups existing partly outside and partly inside the biblical mainstream of Christianity and Judaism. Thus, the current "New Age" phenomenon is "new" only in part: in much of its varied content, it has roots which go deep into the past.

During the first few centuries of the Common Era in the Mediterranean Basin there were, in addition to Church and Synagogue, Gnostic Schools and Hermetic Circles. The former proffered a higher "Gnosis", a more spiritual "Knowledge" of Ultimate Reality than was available in the ordinary Church or Synagogue, and together with the Gnosis were given the means by which the soul could escape from the prison of the material world. The latter, the Hermetic Circles, promised initiation into the mystical "Secrets" and Magic of Ancient Egypt and the Near East.

On a higher, more reflective level of culture, there developed Middle Platonism and then Neo-Platonism which inculcated meditation techniques leading to supra-mental states of ecstasy, of ineffable experience which emptied the mind, lifting the soul out of the world of ordinary sense data and intellectual concepts.

These small groups had very different historical relationships with ancient Christianity. Middle and Neo-Platonism were rather quickly assimilated into the contemplative life of the Church by leading writers like Origen, Augustine and Pseudo-Denis. Gnostic groups also tried to enter the mainstream Christianity, but after several centuries of intense conflict, they were finally excluded as alien to the Scriptures. By contrast, the Hermetic groups normally wished to remain completely apart from Christianity as well as any other form of populist non-elite institutional religion. The same sorting out occurred with Judaism also. Neo Platonism finally entered Judaism as one of the sources for the later mystical development called the "Kabbalah". It also flowed into Islam as one of the basic elements of Persian Sufism. As for the Gnostic groups, they were finally repelled from Judaism also as anti-Scriptural, and had declined sharply by the time Islam entered on the Mediterranean scene in the seventh and eighth centuries.

As urban life revived in the high medieval and Renaissance eras (ca. 1190 to 1491), then the old Neo-Platonic mystical tradition — never lost to Eastern Christianity — resurfaced in the Western Church in such brilliant writers as Meister Eckhart, Jan Van Ruysbroeck, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and others. The Gnostic and Hermetic traditions resurfaced also but not within the Church. At the edge of church life stood the bold lay philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola who combined Neo-Platonism with elements of the Kabbalistic mysticism which had grown up in medieval Judaism alongside the standard rabbinical learning of the Talmud. Wholly outside the life of the Church, the old Gnostic, Hermetic and Neo-Platonic traditions were merged by such Renaissance free-speculators as Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella. They and others added additional old elements like Alchemy, Astrology and Witchcraft. These were all blended into a general view of the world and nature which came to be called the "Occult", the "Hidden Reality". Not unconnected with this intense rise of the Occult during the High Renaissance is the much increased effort by Christian authorities — from the late 1400's through the late 1600's — to stamp out "pagan" and "satanic" practices like witchcraft.

These "hidden" streams ebbed noticeably during the rationalism of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. But they resumed noticeably during the romanticism of the early nineteenth century. Out of Reformed Christianity, there developed New England Transcendentalism with its "oversoul" in each soul. On a more popular level, there was Christian Science which announced Immortal Mind and the non-materiality of matter, while Spiritualism and its Mediums claimed to pierce the secrets of the Afterlife.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, in the 1880's, came Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*. These volumes introduced occidental readers for the first time to full texts — and not mere secondary reports — of Hindu and Buddhist meditative and speculative writings. This had a radicalizing effect in two directions: it promoted, on the one hand, an increasingly accurate knowledge of authentic Hindu and Buddhist teaching, especially that of Vedanta and later, of Zen Buddhism. Both traditions were ultimately to be represented by genuine teachers from India and Japan who founded widely respected centers of Oriental religious learning in Oxford, London and Paris, in New York and later on in Los Angeles and other American cities. On the other hand, by the 1920's and 1930's, alongside this more scholarly religious development, there had grown up a semi-popular syncretism: westernized versions of "Oriental" truth, or "orientalized" versions of western thinking. Certain leading modern "occult" writers came on the scene. Of them, the three best known — all, coincidentally, Russians — are Nikolai Gurdjieff with his Sufi-influenced "Great Knowledge" of the higher "Real World", and his disciple, P. D. Ouspensky with his "Tertium Organum" theory of a higher "Fourth Dimension" of the Real above "space and time", and perhaps the most widely influential of the three, the late nineteenth century figure, Mme. Helena Blavatsky with her "Secret Doctrine" of "Theosophy" or "Divine Wisdom". This is a universal synthesis of all "mystical" Truth, East and West, learned by her, as she claims, from Masters in Tibet⁴¹.

Terminologies and secondary tenets of these elite movements vary considerably, but the basic principles are the same: a totalizing or "holistic" view of reality as one fluid, spiritual, organic whole, a concept of the inmost soul as essentially

identical with Divine Reality and not just a derived image of it; and a restlessness with ordinary mundane religious life and its dualities and divisions. All of these "unifying" groups regard the specific doctrines, institutions and laws of different traditions as mere outer "husks" alien to the Higher Truth of the One Spirit.

The cultural climate from the 1920's to the early 1960's in the West — an era of two destructive world wars and a demoralizing economic depression — favoured either a scientific positivism which thought of human life as a random contingency in an impersonal universe or an existentialism which emphasized the enigmatic gap between human self-consciousness and the sub-human world. Both were profoundly anti-holistic. In Western Christian theology the dominant emphasis was on the specificity and "supernatural" normativeness of the New Testament and Tradition in strong contrast to non-biblical and thus merely "natural" religion. Yet even during that era some writers saw links between certain types of Western Christian mysticism and that of the Orient. In the 1920's Rudolph Otto compared the great Vedanta mystic-theologian Sankara with Meister Eckhart, and a generation later, in the 1950's, D.T. Suzuki would draw similar parallels between Zen Buddhism and Eckhart.

With the great cultural shift of the 1960's, this East-West comparative approach began to expand and move towards the centre of Christian thought in elite liberal church circles. Many factors in the 1960's and 1970's helped to bring about this change: the emphasis on "experience", on feeling and intuition as deeper and truer than abstract thought; the Vatican II *aggiornamento* in the Catholic Church; the rise of a search for a more "planetary" mode of religion which would be more "deeply ecumenical" than the ordinary inter-Christian ecumenism. In the 1960's the Cistercian writer Thomas Merton renewed Suzuki's interest in Christian-Zen Buddhist links. Subsequently, theological writers like John Hick, Wifred Cantwell Smith and Thomas Berry began calling for an end to what they saw as the narrow and inadequate old Christian claim of having an exclusive, or even merely the "fullest", divine revelation in the historical Christ. All revelation is true and full.

This new "planetary" approach to religion was joined in the 1970's and 1980's by still newer emphases: on technique for self-realization and self-perfecting via meditation and other psychological exercises; on feminist liberation from traditional "patriarchy"; on "environmental" care and love of the Earth as Mother; on a rejection of western rationalism and technologism as ultimate arbiters of truth and meaning. Indeed, 'science' itself was broadened by some writers to include a creative merger between Oriental thought — Chinese Taosim — and western Physics⁴².

All of these late twentieth century streams of experience began flowing together to an unprecedented degree. And they were joined by older streams: karma and reincarnationism from Hinduism; Kabbalistic lore from mystical Judaism; Spiritualist seances and "channelling" by "spirit guides"; Neo-Platonism; neo-gnosticism, neo-hermeticism, magic, the use of crystals and incense, tarot cards and spells, alchemy and astrology. The old folk and nature religions were rehabilitated, especially those of "Native American" or "Amerindian" tribes with their concepts of the Shaman, the holy healer and visionary teacher. Religious Feminists rehabilitated the old Euro-American "Wicca" or beneficent Witchcraft as a manifestation of the Mother Goddess of Earth and of Woman Power. The "pagan" was re-evaluated and declared to be natural and thus religiously good.

These and other similar developments consituted by the early 1980's what has come to be termed 'the New Age Movement' of groups having no central authority but all sharing common affinities. The "Movement" is particularly strong in its places of origin, the West Coast and Rocky Mountain areas of the United States. But it has been spreading steadily eastward and has even begun to extend itself to the American-influenced circles in Western Europe. The movement has enthusiastic practitioners and proponents who include entertainment industry celebrities and some converted scientists along with many thousands of "ordinary" middle and upper-middle class individuals. The Movement has grown large enough to sponsor conventions and to publish magazines and catalogues offering an astonishing multiplicity of different aspects of the new Holism. Academic study of the emergent phenomena has, inevitably, now

begun also. Monographs are being written and conferences planned⁴³.

The cultural result of "the New Age Movement" is, in effect, a re-sacralizing and then a re-divinizing of Nature and the Cosmos, of body and sensuality and Eros as parts of the one great Divine Totality. With the Cosmos and the human self understood as harmonizing parts of the whole, the goal becomes the self-realizing and self-perfecting of the divine inner Self or higher Soul.

New Age thought has begun to flow into certain advanced liberal Christian communities and circles. Father Thomas Berry, for example, substitutes a God-Earth immanence for the old patriarchal God as pure Transcendence⁴⁴. Perhaps the clearest, most striking proponent is Fr Matthew Fox, a Dominican friar⁴⁵. The American press has referred to him in particular as 'the New Age Priest'. A devotional writer with a very vivid and often pungent style, Fr. Fox takes what he sees to be the core-truths of the New Age Movement and uses them to perfect the Christian tradition. He wishes to rid Christianity of the distorting negativities which have concealed its true positive core. Thus, "Original Sin" and the "Fall-Redemption" type of spirituality are replaced by the 'Original Blessing' and an unfallen "Creation Spirituality". Eckhart's intuition of God as identical with the inmost core of the soul replaces Augustine's defective concepts of sin and separation from God at the core of the soul. The "historical Jesus" is subordinated to the broader and vaster truth of "the Cosmic Christ" present and active in all religions at their positive centre. Fr. Fox claims to find this deep insight in Paul, Irenaeus, Eckhart, Teilhard de Chardin and others. In the pastoral sphere, Christian spirituality must pass from immaturity, struggle, tension and self-condemnation to maturity, peace, joy and celebration of one's Self as good and sharing in God's nature. To inculcate these views, Fr. Fox founded the Institute for Creation Spirituality currently located at Holy Names College, Oakland, California.

Needless to say, this New Age version of Christianity is highly controversial. Christian critics, Catholics and Protestants alike, have assailed it bitterly. They accuse it of being a form of Neo-Paganism which has abandoned a Christ-centred Scrip-

tural revelation in favour of an overt syncretism. By early 1986, Rome had entered into the dispute. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, examined Fr. Fox's writings, and then declared them to be particularly dangerous deviations from Biblical Truth. In December of 1988, the Cardinal ordered Fr. Fox to begin a "year of silence" to meditate and reconsider his views. Fr. Fox obeyed, but not before addressing an "Open Letter" in the secular press to "Brother Ratzinger", suggesting that his Eminence step down also for "a year of silence" and join the other brothers and sisters of Creation Spirituality in a "circle dance". The Cardinal seems to have made no public reply to this unusual invitation.

It will take a generation or so at least before the issues here are sorted out. There is a rule of thumb in classical Catholic theology that no movement, not even a heresy, is without some core-truth which energizes it and attracts disciples, but which is exaggerated or out of balance with other truths. It seems clear enough that Catholic Tradition cannot transform itself into Creation Spirituality. Too many aspects of biblical-revelation would not fit that model. But it may well be that some elements of Creation Spirituality might, in a nuanced or modified form, be assimilable to Catholic Tradition: perhaps a renewed emphasis on divine immanence and a further refining and moderating of the pessimism of the Augustinian tradition and a further sensitization to other religious perspectives. However, only time will tell precisely how much of this New Age Christianity will prove baptizable and therefore Christian.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church has never lived in complete isolation from the cultural currents that have affected every age. This latter part of the twentieth century is no exception. In the movements of interreligious dialogue, liberation theology, feminism and "New Age" spirituality, we see the Church undergoing transformation, renewal and ferment. To be faithful to her call as the bride of Christ, the Church will always possess some enduring elements. However, as the pilgrim people of God, the Church is forever on a journey through time. Along the path of this journey, the Church assimilates, grows, reacts and responds to the new movements that come her way. How will

the Church know what to accept and what to reject? Here we must appeal in faith to the guidance of that Mysterious and Holy Spirit which is the true soul of the Church.

Robert L. Fastiggi
St. Edward's University
Austin, Texas 78704.

Charles Stinson
Dartmouth College, Hanover
New Hampshire 03755

Foot Notes

- 1 See James Conner, O C. S. O. "Western Monasticism Meets the East" in *The Catholic World* (May/June 1990), pp 137-143.
- 2 For example, the Vedas are used for meditative reading at Shantivanam. See Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p 10
- 3 See article by Lucio Brunelli, "Missionaries Without Christ?" in *30 Days* (March, 1939), pp. 55-51. Brunelli's article not only mentions Knitter but also Panikkar.
- 4 See Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, op. cit. 5 Ibid., p.111
- 6 Jose Pereira, "Epiphanies of Revelation", *Thought* Vol. 51, No. 201 (June, 1976), p. 204.
- 7 J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrine! Documents of the Catholic Church*, (New York: Alba House, 1982), p 293. 8 Ibid. p. 294
- 9 See essay by Paul Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, John Hick and Paul Knitter, ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 178-200
- 10 See B. Animananda, *The Blade: The Life and Work of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya* (Calcutta: Roy & Son, 1945).
- 11 "On Christian Meditation" in *The Pope Speaks* Vol. 35, No. 2 (May/April, 1990), p 95.
- 12 Published in English as *A Theology of Liberation* in 1973 by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y.
- 13 For more on Metz see Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* trans. C. Inda and J. Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1973), pp. 220-225
- 14 Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p 10. 15 Ibid., p. 9
- 16 Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"*, Vatican translation (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 84), p. 18
- 17 L. Boff and C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 28
- 18 Ibid. 19. Ibid. 20. Ibid. p. 20. 21. Ibid., p. 59
- 22 Ibid. 23. *Instruction on Certain Aspects*, p. 25
- 24 1986 *Catholic Almanac*, Felician Foy and Rose Avato, editors (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 85), p. 64

- 25 Ibid. p. 94
26. Gutierrez, p. 301
- 27 *Instruction on Certain Aspects*, p. 27.
28. Boff, pp. 64-65
- 29 Many liberation theologians have a special fondness for the Gospel of Luke and find in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) a powerful witness of God's solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. See Boff, p. 58
30. See Ferrn, p.4
- 31 Is Liberal Capitalism the Only Path?, *Origins*, May 24, 1990; Vol. 20, no. 2., p. 19
32. Ibid.
- 33 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Dell Books, 1962)
- 34 Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 113ff.
- 35 See Pastoral Letter of U. S. Bishops, "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption. A Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns for Church and Society, sec. 220 in *Origins*, Vol. 17: 45 (April 21, 1988), p.731. The bishops have recently issued a revised draft of this pastoral letter.
- 36 See Elisabeth Shussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (N. Y.; Crossroad, 83)
- 37 A good study of contemporary Catholic Feminism can be found in Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 85)
- 38 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, (Boston: Beacon, 1983)
- 39 On Mary Daly, see her book *The Church and the Second Sex*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1968) which reappeared in 1975 in a second edition with a "New Feminist Post-Christian" preface.
- 40 William Oddie, *What Then Will Happen to God?* (London: SPCK, 1984).
- 41 For more on Madam Blavatsky and the Theosophical connection with the current New Age movement, see Kenneth Paul Kramer, "The Newest New Age", *The Catholic World* (May, June 1983), pp.100-105.
- 42 See Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (N. Y. Bantam Books, 1975).
- 43 Many Christian theologians had been taught by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Harvey Cox in the early 1960's to prepare the Churches for a future secularizing urban culture of a "religionless" or non-transcendental sort. Thus, they were caught quite by surprise two decades later when the diffused religiosity of the New Age began dawning in precisely those urban middle class circles that had been expected to be secular and rationalistic. It is one of the striking ironies of recent theological history.
- 44 See Thomas Berry, *The Dream of Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988) and Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards, ed. *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*, (Mystic, Conn. Twenty-Third Pub, 87)
- 45 Most notable among Father Fox's books are *Wheel We, Wee All the Way Home* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1981), *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1983) and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

Nature-Mysticism as the Basis of Eco-Spirituality

Today in North America, Europe, Australia and even in Japan, or the First World, there is a new sensitivity towards the natural world. An intense intimacy and identity with nature — a hallmark of the self-understanding of the native cultures, like the American Indians, the Australian aborigines and the tribal societies of Africa — are characteristic of this new development in man's spiritual history, a development that is actually quite primordial, and so, in its contemporary expression, constitutes a return. This sensitivity towards nature — what Thomas Berry, a great American ecological philosopher, calls *presence*¹ — exists in some form or another in every culture, or the insight and value is at least represented. Clearly discernible in the higher civilizations of China, India and Japan, especially in their art and literature, it is just as evident in Medieval Christianity in a figure like Francis of Assisi and his early followers. A mutual presence² informs this perennial sensitivity: man to nature, and nature, with all its remarkable diversity, to man.

Ecological spirituality, with its roots in nature-mysticism, and the religion of nature, as it was for the German, English and American Romantics, is a kind of "new religion", though the religion of nature is the most ancient traditional source of wisdom for the numerous cultures of antiquity. Indeed, the experience of the Divine Reality in the natural world is man's first religious awakening, and this natural religion is his primordial tradition, to whose fountain he continually returns for refreshment and a renewal of his perspective, while gaining strength to carry on the journey. Thus to speak of eco-spirituality as a "new religion" is not exactly true, since its spiritual foundation is timeless. What is new, however, is the

radical commitment to the Earth itself, to protect and preserve it as a religious and moral responsibility. I would like to consider this ecological spirituality in relation to its two most significant proponents, Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox. It will be useful also to examine what is meant by the term "nature-mysticism", what is behind it.

What is basically happening in America, for instance, commencing with the end of the Second World War, and accelerating with Vatican II, is a spiritual awakening in the hearts of countless millions who want something more than the ritualism of the liturgy. These people have found Sunday mass or worship service too formal, dry, uninspiring and often meaningless; they are seeking, however faint, an experiential contact with God or Ultimate Reality, and they are interested in means, techniques, methods or disciplines that promise to deliver such a needed and passionately desired contact. This is the essential reason for America's extraordinary openness to the Asian religions, new movements and ideas, some of which may seem extreme, arbitrary, partial or down-right negative or even destructive. It is this hunger for experience, for a secret gnosis or esoteric knowledge that underlies America's tolerance of a dizzying array of views. Other factors enter in to create the ambience of pluralism: America's diverse origins and nature, her dynamic fascination with the novel and the quaint, her liberal democratic ideals, her lack of deep-culture, and finally, as a consequence of this lack, the spiritual immaturity of the masses within the American society.

Nature-mysticism

At the same time, the consequences of the Industrial Revolution – air pollution, contamination of water and soil, damaging oil spills, acid rain, horrible devastation of the rain forests, the extinction of tens of thousands of species, global warming or the green-house effect as a result of depleting the ozone layer of the earth's atmosphere through the use of harmful chemicals on a large scale etc. – have shocked people out of their consumeristic slumber, galvanizing them into concerted action for the protection of the environment. Thus, the Green movement and eco-spirituality have emerged out of the negative results of modern industrial society, and the destruction of the natural world has reawakened a passion for wilderness consciousness.

nature-mysticism and the values of the fresh, unmolested beauty of the earth in its wild, natural state. The ecological crisis, which is currently in full swing on the planet, has generated a new interest in the old nature-mysticism, a mystical vision that is always relevant, possessing timeless qualities and values perennially nurturing humankind in each age. Let us examine what this nature-mysticism is and the notion of the cosmic revelation behind it.

Nature-mysticism is really a sort of spiritual or inner illumination. It is the ability to perceive the infinite Presence of the Divine immanent in the natural world, and this is, as Evelyn Underhill tells us, "an overpowering apprehension"³. In this sense, it is the capacity to "read" the *Book of Creation*, to grasp the hidden meanings, symbols and archetypes present in the natural world, being and human life. Everything is revelatory of the Ultimate Mystery and is part of what we can call theophanic truth, the intuition that nature, being and life express something of the Divine. Bede Griffiths describes the content of this intuition: "Always it has been understood that our life in this world, as Keats said, is a 'perpetual allegory'; everything has meaning only in reference to something beyond ... We only begin to awake to reality when we realise that the material world, the world of space and time, as it appears to our senses, is nothing but a sign and a symbol of a mystery which infinitely transcends it"⁴.

When a person enters into this state of awareness, this illuminated consciousness, it can be characterized by the term *theophanic* because he has left behind mundane experience and thought, and is propelled into a mystical kind of consciousness in which the Divine Reality shines forth. This is what Thomas Merton calls *natural contemplation* or *theōria physike*. He says: "*Theōria physike* is contemplation of the 'divine in nature, not contemplation of the divine by our natural powers. And in fact, 'natural contemplation' in this sense is mystical: that is to say it is a gift of God, a divine enlightenment."⁵ The nature-mystic is granted a special type of experience, first of the cosmos around him, and secondly of his relationship with it. He is allowed to perceive the Presence of the Source, and experiences an identity with the various manifestations of nature. The ethereal beauty of nature, being exposed to this beauty,

triggers natural contemplation or nature-mysticism. Wordsworth alludes to this mystical awakening through contact with creation's splendor. In a moment of poetic rapture, he exalts in a mysterious perception of the natural world and the primordial knowledge it makes accessible to him:

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth, and every common sight, to me did seem,
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream....,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts
That do often lie too deep for tears⁶.

Wordsworth, like the other Romantic poets, especially Byron and Shelley, experienced an inner awakening in the presence of nature, but an awakening confined to nature as object and medium of a revelation. Sun, moon, stars, ocean, woods, birds, flowers, trees, mountains and animals etc. can stir the capacity for natural mysticism. Forrest Reid, a British novelist at the turn of the century, captures in an eloquently simple way the depth and richness of the experience when he writes: "It was as if I had never realized how lovely the world was. I lay down on my back in the warm, dry moss and listened to the skylark singing as it mounted up from the fields near the sea into the dark clear sky. No other music gave me the same pleasure as that passionate joyous singing. It was a kind of leaping, exultant ecstasy, a bright, flame-like sound, rejoicing in itself. And then a curious experience befell me. It was as if everything that had seemed to be external and around me were suddenly within me. The whole world seemed to be within me. It was within me that the trees waved their green branches; it was within me that the skylark was singing; it was within me that the hot sun shone, and that the shade was cool. A cloud rose in the sky, and passed in a light shower that pattered on the leaves, and I felt its freshness dropping into my soul, and I felt in all my being the delicious fragrance of the earth and the grass and the plants and the rich brown soil. I could have sobbed for joy."⁷

In this novelist's experience it is a bird, the skylark that unlocks the sense of identity in him with all of the cosmos, a sense of oneness with each natural entity or being. He realizes a sort of continuity with the universe in all its members: how

each thing is in him and he is in them. Bede Griffiths had a similar breakthrough, only in his experience it was an encounter with the Divine immanent in the natural world. He remarks: "I liked the solitude and the silence of the woods and the hills. I felt there the sense of a Presence, something undefined and mysterious, which was reflected in the faces of the flowers and the movements of birds and animals, in the sunlight falling through the leaves and in the sound of running water, in the wind blowing on the hills and the wide expanse of earth and sky"⁸.

Here, in Bede's lovely mystical awakening, we see something of the Cosmic Revelation, the primordial or first revelation to all of humankind that comes through the universe. The Cosmic Revelation is the communication of the Divine Presence in and through the created order or nature and in the depths of the self, when the subject-object relation is superseded. It is "the revelation of ultimate Truth, given to all mankind through the Cosmos, that is, through creation"⁹, as Bede puts it. The Cosmic Revelation, in its universal form, is the manifestation of the Divine, the Sacred Mystery in nature, being and life. This revelation of the Divine, especially in nature, is recorded in the great myths of origin of the primitive societies. In the tradition of the American Dakota Indians, for example, the mysterious Sacred Presence, the Spirit of God is called the *Taku Wakan*, the "Great Spirit". Also the presence of spirit in the natural world, in man, animals, birds, fish, vegetation and natural objects is called *manitou* by the Algonquin Indians. The Cosmic Revelation — a revelation always available to us, going on right now or in each moment of time and at every point of the appearing universe — is the source of all nature-mysticism.

This revelation is even mentioned in the biblical tradition. For in the Book of Wisdom we read: "Yes, naturally stupid are all men who have not known God and who, from the good things that are seen, have not been able to discover Him Who is... since through the grandeur and beauty of the creatures we may, by analogy, contemplate their Author"¹⁰. St. Paul, centuries later, in his Letter to the Romans, expresses it in even clearer terms, when he proclaims: "Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity — however [invisible — have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made]"¹¹.

Through the experience of the Cosmic Revelation always going on, a mystical knowledge is readily available to man; it is an esoteric knowledge of the Divine or Ultimate Reality conveyed through the forms of the cosmos as a whole. In this sense, we can speak of the universe as the mediated presence of the unmediated, infinite Mystery.

Thomas Berry

Father Thomas Berry, an American Passionist and an expert in the history of cultures — formerly a professor of the history of religions at Fordham — has emerged in recent years as one of the great prophets of ecological awareness, environmental sanity/action and what we can call eco-spirituality. On this whole issue he has been a lonely "voice crying in the wilderness", albeit a rather eloquent and inspiring one. For decades he has spoken out relentlessly, with courage, clarity and practical wisdom. Slowly he has beaten against the seemingly impenetrable inertia of the status quo and the apparent remoteness of environmental concerns to the pressing demands of daily life for the masses of average people. But because Tom Berry's vision, though solidly based on a theoretical foundation, was reinforced by the utter urgency of the environmental crisis, of the enormous threats to the ecology of the planet, indeed to its health and very survival — threats epitomized by environmental disasters on a magnitude affecting the whole of planetary life and its various support systems — his message has begun to be heard and taken seriously. For as the environmental crisis has gotten worse in its global dimensions, interest in Tom Berry's approach has grown steadily.

The practical need to change direction on our planet, to spark a revolution in our thinking about the earth before it's too late, is the radical focus of Thomas Berry's efforts. The earth as a process of life and beauty is the fundamental value for him. It is this value that governs his understanding of and commitment to ecology, and it is this value and commitment that determine his own view of a creation-centered or eco-spirituality. His vision of spirituality is thus practical in its aims, but its principles are derived primarily from sources other than the Christian tradition, from the new physics, astro-physics, astronomy and biology; from the natural wisdom of the Native American traditions, and from Teilhard's spiritual evolutionary

theory — even though this is arguably Christian in inspiration for Teilhard himself.

Berry's eco-spirituality is a kind of nature-mysticism, but a very special or unique type, one that emphasizes the immanence of the Divine in nature itself, not its transcendence, as in most other forms of nature-mysticism. The notion of the numinous is an essential category of Thomas Berry's thought, and is one of the means of expressing his brand of nature-mysticism, which is more a mystical "geo-logy" than a "theo-logy". In fact, he regards himself as a "geo-logian" rather than a "theo-logian". The term "numinous" of course comes from Rudolf Otto¹² whose meaning is much richer and more comprehensive than that of Berry's. By the word "numinous" Otto is suggesting a pre-ethical understanding of the Sacred, an understanding that stresses the elements of mystery, ineffability, awesomeness and mystical attributes. He says that it cannot be taught or grasped: "...it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened"¹³. This numinous quality of the Divine or Sacred, that which is characteristic of our experience or feeling as we encounter It and which precedes the moral category of goodness or holiness that became identified with It in the biblical tradition, communicates the reality of a transcendental Mystery.

Berry's appropriation of Otto's term does not possess this transcendent sense of the Divine Mystery, though it does include the feeling level of experience in the presence of nature and the entire cosmic sphere. Each natural being, every wonder in creation reflects in some way the Divine Reality, making it present. Within the context of addressing the dire threat to other species, a threat generated by man himself, Berry refers to the immanent presence of the Divine in the natural world. He comments: "We should be clear about what happens when we destroy the living forms of this planet. The first consequence is that we destroy modes of divine presence. If we have a wonderful sense of the divine, it is because we live amid such awesome magnificence"¹⁴.

The universe, nature and the various forms of life all around us transmit to us the mystery of the Source. Our sense of the Absolute is derived from our experience of creation's vast splendor. This is at least true in most cases, though Christian

mysticism demonstrates the direct intervention of God Himself in giving Himself in love to the soul. Berry regards natural or cosmic revelation not simply as primordial and perennial but as always primary. He observes how much our understanding of God is based on our experience of the natural world which reveals Him in some mysterious way, and he mentions how this mode of experience is being obscured, how we are in effect losing awareness of this primary source of revelation.

Berry's variation of nature-mysticism, his eco-spirituality is firmly underscored by the integrity and value of the earth and what he calls the "earth process", the whole reality of the planet in all its diversity of life-forms and environmental situations. His spiritual vision is not so much of the Divine Reality, but rather of the divinity of the earth itself, which he regards as a living organism¹⁵ as proposed, for instance, in the Gaia hypothesis. Berry wants to draw attention to the concrete, existential theological significance of the planet as such, and not to the earth as a reflection of or springboard to the Ultimate Mystery of the One. His task is to educate us in the sacrality of the earth itself, to teach us that it is the planet that has absolute value in the long run. He feels that emphasis on transcendence, the Redemption and even divine immanence distracts us from this supreme value and the actions associated with promoting this insight.

Berry defends a deeper understanding of the natural world, a view committed to it as a living being. For it is the matrix of our life and health, as well as being the medium of all our higher values. Berry wishes us to realize these insights, insights over which he has labored long. The earth is defended for practical reasons: it is the mother of our higher existence just as much as it is our sustainer in biological terms. Berry says: "The natural world is subject as well as object. The natural world is the material source of our being as earthlings and the life-giving nourishment of our physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and religious existence. The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence."¹⁶

This last statement — an ethical appeal identified with our own ultimate self-interest as a species — really brings us to the heart of Tom Berry's project: to save the earth by changing our relationship to it, a change which also affects how we understand ourselves. Part of this change requires that we see ourselves as fundamentally involved with the natural world, as essentially connected to it, having the nature of emergent reflective beings who have arisen out of the earth process itself. We are not separate from the cosmos, but in the "eye" of it, for we are its self-consciousness, if we accept Berry's espousal of the anthropic principle. He maintains: "Creation, however, must now be experienced as the emergence of the universe as a psychic-spiritual as well as a material-physical reality from the beginning. We need to see ourselves as integral with this emergent process, as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself."¹⁷

The anthropic principle — something which Teilhard certainly advanced — places man at the heart of the goal of creation. The universe aims at man as its self-consciousness, that is, as Berry formulates it, as the means through which it knows or perceives itself, its beauty, splendour and endless creativity expressed in its teeming diversity of forms. Berry, however, does not consider man to be the goal of the universe, but simply a noetic function within it. Man is not the apex, as the doctrine of the Redemption and a Christian understanding of the anthropic intuition hold, but the means of the universe's self-awareness and contemplation of itself. His is a different version of the anthropic principle, unique to him and his emphasis on a spirituality based on ecological necessity, sensitivity and justice.

Given his framework and vision, in his view, man must become the servant of the earth's protection, the guardian of a viable earth process. He must alter the negative conditions under his control which he has set in motion. For the ecological crisis, out of which Thomas Berry's thought has developed as background, is man-made. Thus it has to be resolved by man as the new protector of the natural world, rather than its persecutor. Thomas Berry articulates the new thinking required, setting the context for genuine progress: "We must also develop a way of thinking about "progress" that would include the entire earth community. If there is to be real and sustainable

progress, it must be a continuing enhancement of life for the entire planetary community. It must be shared by all the living, from the plankton in the sea to the birds above the land. It must include the grasses, the trees, and the living creatures of the earth. True progress must sustain the purity and life-giving qualities of both the air and the water. The integrity of these life systems must be normative for any progress worthy of the name. Already these three commitments—to the natural world as revelatory, to the earth community as our primary loyalty, and to the progress of the community in its integrity—constitute the new religious-spiritual context for carrying out a change of direction in human-earth development.”¹⁸

According to Thomas Berry, Christian spirituality and the spiritualities of the other world religions do not meet the new situation adequately, nor account for the sacred character of the universe. They do not see the human as part of the cosmic process, but as transcendent to it. They defend a position of the human as separated and so alienated from the natural environment. They look for paradise in another world, instead of finding its roots here. Berry, being a naturalist, advocates an eco-based spirituality, one that is grounded on the numinous or inner reality of the cosmos itself, the cosmos as revelatory of the divine presence. He bases his spirituality on the monumental fact of the universe-event, the expansion, unfolding and evolution of the entire cosmos from its primordial origin some fifteen billion years ago, through its development and the eventual appearance of life. This he calls the “new story”¹⁹.

Thomas Berry sums up his notion of the new story in the graphic terms of cosmic history: “The story of the universe is the story of the emergence of a galactic system in which each new level of expression emerges through the urgency of self-transcendence. Hydrogen in the presence of some millions of degrees of heat emerges into helium. After the stars take shape as oceans of fire in the heavens, they go through a sequence of transformations. Some eventually explode into the star-dust out of which the solar system and the earth take shape. Earth gives unique expression of itself in its rock and crystalline structures and in the variety and splendor of living

forms, until humans appear as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself... We bear the universe in our being as the universe bears us in its being. The two have a total presence to each other and to that deeper mystery out of which both the universe and ourselves have emerged."²⁰

Thomas Berry's eco-spirituality is both eloquently true and urgently needed, but I believe there is more to spirituality than nature-mysticism and the certainly laudable task of saving the natural world from man's stupidity, and so, every form of life on the planet. The new story is not the whole story !!! And that is precisely the point, for while we can easily accept his ecological agenda, we cannot ignore the inner life of the person and the equally necessary work of transformation from self-centredness to the other-centredness of love, that other-centredness that would be so crucial for the kind of radical shift in consciousness conceived by Berry. In the above quote on the new story, he mentions the "deeper mystery". Is that not the Source itself, the Divine Reality, the Godhead? Nature-mysticism never goes far enough, for it is still within the bounds of the subject-object dichotomy and the inevitable dualism it entails. The "whole story" includes this dualism as a stage in man's journey to God, and then finally transcends it in the pure unity of love, when the person, in his deepest centre, cooperating with grace, is transfigured by Divine love, passing over into God.

Matthew Fox

Another significant voice on the American scene in the movement for a creation-oriented spirituality is the fiery and flamboyant Dominican friar, Matthew Fox. Though temperamentally and stylistically different from Thomas Berry, Fox espouses similar themes, and his project is surely congenial to that of Berry's. In a very perceptive article, Thomas Clarke, an American Jesuit, gives a thumbnail sketch of this temperamental and stylistic difference between the principal leaders of the movement for an eco-spirituality: "Whereas Berry tends to be more philosophical and cosmological, Fox more expressively links the creational movement with the most varied theological, pastoral and spiritual concerns of the day.... Berry's passion is mediated through writing that is sober, detached and intellectual, whereas Fox's passion is more 'up front', more ef-

fusive, with a penchant for play, satire and hyperbole that enchants some and exasperates others."²¹

There is something more that distinguishes them, something more than either temperament or style: Fox possesses an at least theoretical appreciation of the mystical journey; he is well-acquainted with the inner process of transformation that goes on in the depths of a soul so-called by grace to mystical life. He has this knowledge from his detailed study of many mystics, especially Meister Eckhart and Mechtilde of Magdeburg, though his writings on these mystics have not been without controversy. Fox's thought is certainly grounded in Christian spirituality; he makes that attempt anyway, though Berry's is not, and this latter makes no pretense to be a representative of Christianity in any sense. While Fox is regarded as unorthodox by the Vatican, his understanding has developed from his own very profound appropriation of the liberating power of mystical contemplation. Only God knows if Fox is himself a mystic, but he definitely has a sense of the implications for theology, the Church, society and the planet of the fullness of the mystical life. For if mysticism is the foundation of one's life it radically alters one's perspective on the role of these four interdependent realms.

There can be no doubt, however, that Fox is a nature-mystic to a very subtle degree. This is clearly evident from his writings. He has been seriously committed to a creation-centered spirituality for many years²², but one that is established on the firmest of foundations in the maturity of the spiritual journey, when that journey finds its completion in the mystical union with the Source, and then a return to the created order of the cosmos, where service becomes the task. Actually, Fox presents, unlike Berry, a complete teaching on the spiritual journey, not simply a naturalistic mystical doctrine, though of course the return to creation assumes the extraordinary value the Divine attaches to the cosmic order and life in all its wonderful variety. Creation or eco-spirituality is the fruit of a mature understanding of the mystical life, its demands and possibilities. Fox seems to have this kind of maturity, at least conceptually.

Limitations of space do not permit me to give a detailed sketch of Matthew Fox's spirituality, but I would like to draw

attention to the heart of it: *panentheism*. Fox derives this doctrine from Eckhart, though the term itself was coined by Karl C. F. Krause (1781-1832), a German philosopher. The notion of panentheism has to do with the relation of the creature to the Creator, and this relationship is purely interior, not external, or dualistic, as in the subject-object relation. Writers who defend panentheism often cite Acts 17:28, that in God "we live and move and have our being", as scriptural justification, one can say revelation, of the correct understanding of the relationship between the created and Divine orders. There is no outside to God, and nothing is or could exist outside of Him. Panentheism requires us to see that all is *in* Him and subsists *in* Him, and that He is *in* all. It is a kind of mutual indwelling, except that creation's subsistence in God is the more important side of the equation, since the dependence would seem to be more absolute. Fox elaborates his understanding of panentheism as the essential principle of creation or eco-spirituality, an understanding that stresses the sacramental character of the natural world. He maintains: "Panentheism ... is altogether orthodox and very fit for orthopraxis as well, for it slips in the little Greek word *en* and thus means, "God is in everything and everything is in God" Panentheism is desperately needed by individuals and religious institutions today. It is the way the creation-centered tradition of spirituality experiences God. It is not theistic because it does not relate to God as subject or object, but neither is it pantheistic. Panentheism is a way of seeing the world sacramentally. Indeed...the primary sacrament is creation itself—which includes every person and being who lives. Other sacraments derive their fruitful and creative power from this primary sacrament. This is one thing that distinguishes pantheism from panentheism—pantheism has no need of sacraments, but panentheism does"²³.

Panentheism, as a sacramental vision of nature, being and human life, becomes the solid ontological ground upon which a naturalistic mysticism is erected, or rather, first one discovers the truth of panentheism—that all is in God etc.—and this discovery leads to, implies or makes intelligible not simply nature-mysticism, but the Cosmic Revelation as well. It becomes the inner truth of both. Panentheism is actually theophanic

awareness, or a species of it. All things reveal God because all things are in Him, exist in Him, and He is likewise in them. They can only reflect Him, their Source. All aspects of creation have a numinous quality — are a mode of divine Presence — because each thing, and the universe as a whole, exists in the divine consciousness. Panentheism is simply the good fortune of knowing the secret of creation, the correct formulation of the relation of creatures to God. All things become open to us in relation to Him. Panentheism is a capacity to perceive the Divine in everything. Fox puts it well and succinctly: “The sacramental consciousness of panentheism develops into a transparent and diaphanous consciousness wherein we can see events and beings as divine.”²⁴ Since all is in God etc., all is, in some sense, God. Each thing is a part of the Divine, reflecting some attribute of the Godhead. Eckhart’s aphorism sums it up quite well: “You are God but God is not you”, or you are an aspect of God’s being and creativity, but He is infinitely more than you. The emphasis on the value and role of creation makes considerable sense in the light of panentheism, and is a needed corrective to the Eastern tendency to devalue the reality of the cosmic, and so degrade its place in the scheme of things. Panentheism and eco-spirituality restore the dignity to the created order, saving it from being merely a convenience for man and his barbaric exploitation and destruction of the natural world, so that he can have his consumer paradise.

Eco-spirituality or creation-centred spirituality is the most important development in this century, ranking in significance to the discovery of the printing press and the Copernican Revolution — perhaps even more so — for with it emerges the realization of the earth and the universe as the heart or focus of our intellectual, moral, aesthetic, practical and spiritual lives. It brings with it a shift in paradigm, a shift which generates a revolution in human consciousness. Eco-spirituality is singularly more significant, as a movement, than any one of the great world religions, when regarded from the larger perspective of the earth process. There will be obvious conflicts with Rome over its direction, basic doctrines etc., and it does run the risk of dividing the world further by becoming a new religion. The real challenge for this movement and for the world religions is to make sure this doesn’t happen — that it isn’t

necessary — because it can and does have a central place in the heart of each of them, being a dimension of spirituality as such. The task is to discover how, and then to implement it. The necessity to do this should be abundantly clear, for eco-spirituality is here to stay, at least as long as the urgency is felt, and the earth is oppressed by man. Only when the ecological crisis abates and is finally resolved will it recede as the paramount value and commitment in spiritual life for so many, though the panentheistic intuition and experience will be perennially relevant, inspiring afresh future generations as long as man inhabits this planet.

Hundred Acres Monastery
New Boston, N. H. 03070

Wayne Teasdale

Foot Notes

- 1 Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, '88), pp. 13-23. 2 Ibid., p. 15
- 3 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (N.Y: Dutton, '61), p. 234
- 4 Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String: An Autobiography* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, '80 rev.), p. 181
- 5 Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: 'Kinds of Contemplation' (IV)*, *Cistercian Studies*, Vol 13, No. 4, '83, p. 298 *The Inner Experience* was a previously unpublished manuscript of Merton's which was serialized in *Cistercian Studies* (Vols 18-19, 1983-'84)
- 6 William Wordsworth, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1900*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925) pp. 603-616. 7 Forrest Reid, *Following the Darkness* (London, 1902) p. 42. 8 B. Griffiths, *Golden String*, p. 28
- 9 B. Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, '82), p. 88. 10. Wisdom 13:1, 5. 11 Romans 1:20
- 12 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), see pp. 4-40. 13. Ibid., p. 7. 14. Berry *Dream of the Earth*, p. 11.
- 15 Ibid., see pp. 13-19. 21-22. Also see James Lovelock's *Gaia. A New Look at Life on Earth* (London: Oxford University Press, '79), and Peter Russell's *The Global Brain: Speculations on the Evolution Leap to Planetary Consciousness* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, '83)
- 16 Ibid. 17 Ibid. 18. Ibid p. 83. 19. Ibid. p. 111. 20. Ibid., p. 132. Thomas E. Clarke, S. J., "Theological Trends: Creational Spirituality, T. Berry and Matthew Fox", *Teilhard Perspective*, July '80 p. 12
- 22 See for example his essay "Meister Eckhart on the Fourfold Path of a Creation Centred Spirituality Journey" in *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes* ed Matthew Fox (Notre Dame, IN: Fides/Claretian, '79), pp. 215-248; also his *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (Garden City, NY: Image Doubleday, '80), and *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe: Bear, '81).
- 23 *Original Blessing*, p. 90. 24. Ibid

Is a Dialogue with ISKCON Possible?

In an earlier article¹, I raised this question: Is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (subsequently referred to as ISKCON)² tolerant of other religions in Mensching's sense of "the positive acceptance of other religions as legitimate possibilities for encounter with the Sacred"?³ Based upon the statements of ISKCON spokesmen, primarily those of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, published from 1968 to 1982, I concluded: 1) that, because of its exclusivist ideology, ISKCON was basically intolerant of other religions; 2) that ISKCON's intolerance was limited by its recognition of the validity and effectiveness of those beliefs and practices of other religions which could be interpreted to fit into its own orthodoxy and orthopraxis; and 3) that ISKCON's intolerance rendered meaningful dialogue with other religions impossible.

Recently, the question of dialogue between ISKCON and other religions has been raised anew. For some commentators, there presently exists a favourable climate for dialogue between ISKCON and the Christian Church. In a recent issue of the ISKCON Review, Śubhānanda Dās (Steven J. Gelberg), ISKCON's Director for Interreligious Affairs, insists that the Hare Krishna movement is quite open to dialogue, especially with Roman Catholicism⁴. In response, John A. Saliba S. J. claims that the presence of the new religious movements confronts the Church with a challenge: Can we (Christians) come to terms with religious pluralism without either compromising our religious identity or lapsing into religious bigotry and persecution⁵.

However, a similar challenge faces ISKCON. Turning Saliba's question around we can ask: Can ISKCON come to terms with religious pluralism? Specifically, what evidence exists to suggest that ISKCON is prepared to shed its traditional exclusivism and recognize the unique elements of other religions as legitimate possibilities for encounter with the Sacred?

This question will be addressed in two parts. Following a brief summary of ISKCON's traditional view of other reli-

gions, I will offer an assessment of present possibilities based primarily on the views of Śubhananda Das. I shall conclude that, while ISKCON's failure to eschew its traditional exclusivism continues to be a major obstacle in the way of meaningful dialogue, there are indications that some within ISKCON may be willing to modify ISKCON's exclusivism in order to foster dialogue with other faiths.

The problem vis-à-vis ISKCON's view of other religions arises from apparently contradictory statements by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, the founder-ācārya, and other ISKCON spokesmen regarding ISKCON's tolerance of other religions⁶. On the one hand, ISKCON would appear to accept other religions as valid paths to the Sacred. "It doesnot matter whether one is Christian, Hindu or Muslim", says Bhaktivedanta Swami, "the real purpose of life is to know God"⁷. ISKCON, we are informed, is not trying to convert Christians into Hindus. By hearing and practising Krishna Consciousness, claims the swami, not only can a Christian remain a Christian; he can become a better Christian⁸.

On the other hand, Bhaktivedanta Swami appears to reject all other religions as false. "Why remain Hindu? Why remain Muslim? Why remain Christian?", asks the swami. "Give up all this nonsense", he continues. "Just surrender to Krishna ...If you follow a false religious system, you suffer: but if you follow a real religious system, you'll be happy"⁹.

The key to understanding ISKCON's view of other religions is its distinction between "spiritual religion" and "materialistic religion"¹⁰. The one, true, authentic, real, "spiritual religion" is "sanatana-dharma" which is rooted in human generation and lies outside history. It is revealed in two infallible texts: the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and the *Bhagavadgītā* and any discrepancy in executing the rules laid down in these texts renders one irreligious.

In his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, Bhaktivedanta Swami describes the basic principles of pure, "spiritual religion": the "varnāśrama-dharma" system (the four ranks of social life), the concepts of "samsara" and "karma", the literal truth of Krishna mythology, the four ethical principles (no meat-eating, no illicit sex, no gambling and no intoxicants), and the correct worship of God (Krishna) through the chanting of the Hare

Krishna mantra. This pure, "scientific" form of religion, originally revealed by Krishna, has been infallibly preserved through a succession of gurus (the *parampara*) down to Bhaktivedanta Swami and the present ISKCON spiritual masters. One cannot progress in spiritual life without the aid of a bona fide guru, that is an ISKCON spiritual master. And the spiritual master's order should be taken as the prime duty of life¹¹.

ISKCON contrasts its own "spiritual religion", the eternal, spiritual science of Krishna Consciousness with the "faith" or "materialistic religion" of all other men. Religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are man-centred rather than God-centred. Their adherents practise religion for selfish ends such as bread ("Give us this day..."), the hope of salvation or some material profit¹². Because such "faiths" are historically conditioned, they have de facto become corrupted and today often serve state and national interests¹³.

Because ISKCON's perennial religion is synonymous with the inherent nature of man, it transcends sectarianism and ultimately nullifies all designations, such as "Christian" or "Hindu"¹⁴. And, according to Bhaktivedanta Swami, the pure religion which negates all designations is 'bhakti'¹⁵. Thus, the following conclusion is inescapable:

"Since God is one, religion must also be one. There is one common religion of all living entities, and that is Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or 'sanatana-dharma'... We are not Christians, Jews, Hindus or Moslems, for these are all bodily designations."¹⁶

ISKCON leaves no room for doubt on this point. "Pure love of God", says Bhaktivedanta Swami, "is not found in Islam or Christianity or Vaisnavism but only in Kṛṣṇa worship"¹⁷.

In sum, ISKCON's traditional ideology is intolerant of other religions in two senses: 1) it rejects other religions as authentic possibilities for encounter with the Sacred (specifically, an authentic experience of God); and 2) it repudiates other religions as untrue, misleading and ultimately ineffective.

Nevertheless, ISKCON's intolerance of other religions does have its limits. While ISKCON categorically rejects as false all forms of non-theistic religion, such as "the nihilistic, non-devotional Buddhist sects"¹⁸, it does recognize the validity and

efficacy of those theistic beliefs and practices of other religions which, in its view, reinforce its own understanding of authentic religion. Thus, Bhaktivedanta Swami acknowledges that Muslims who chant "Allah" and Christians who chant "Jesus" can become God conscious¹⁹.

However, ISKCON's attempts to fit the beliefs of other religions into its own ideological stance often lead to major distortions. For example, although, in the ISKCON view, God Himself appeared in India, in the form of Krishna, he sent his representatives, notably Lord Jesus and Lord Muhammed, to other parts of the globe in order to proclaim his eternal religion.

The case of Jesus is revealing. According to Bhaktivedanta Swami, the name "christos" is the Greek version of the Sanskrit name "kṛṣṇa" and when Jesus spoke of God as "father", he was referring to Krishna²⁰. Although Jesus himself was a 'guru' and a perfect devotee of God (Krishna), he himself was not God²¹. Kīrtanananda Swami explains the status of Jesus as follows:

"Christ's claim to be the son of God is often misunderstood. This claim is meant not quantitatively but qualitatively... Why should God have only one Son? Even a mere human being can have dozens of sons. Being infinite God can have billions and trillions of sons, and by His inconceivable energy each and every one can be his 'only' son."²²

Actually, Jesus taught Krishna consciousness but due to the time, place and circumstances in which he taught, he was unable to give complete instruction²³. However, there are indications in the gospels that Jesus was "Krishna conscious". For example, in the Prologue to John's gospel, the term "logos" means the "transcendental sound" of Hare Krishna²⁴.

In sum, ISKCON's traditional ideology, as enunciated by ISKCON spokesmen from 1968 to 1982, rejected the uniqueness of other religions and accepted only those elements of other religions which could be reinterpreted to support its own exclusivist view. Obviously, this absolutist, monologic view was not conducive to meaningful dialogue.

However, recent overtures toward other religions begun by ISKCON intellectuals, notably Subhananda Das and Ravindra-svarupa Das, represent a new initiative on several counts. First, ISKCON appears willing to eschew its traditional exclu-

sivism in favour of a religiously pluralistic world. For example, although ISKCON has traditionally rejected the "Hindu" label in favour of a "gnosis" transcending all designations, it now recognizes itself as a Hindu religion, specifically, one of the four "sampradayas" within the Vaisnava tradition²⁵. In its doctrine and theology, as well as its ascetical, liturgical, and contemplative practices", claims Subhananda Das, "the Krishna consciousness movement participates fully in...India's devotional heritage"²⁶.

Second, we noted above that traditional ISKCON ideology tried to demonstrate that Christianity at its best is really Krishna Consciousness. However, present ISKCON spokesmen are quite prepared to acknowledge important differences between the two religions. Ravindra-svarūpa Das, for example, insists that the Indian-ISKCON cyclical view of history embodies "an essential difference between the religious traditions of Indian and those of Semitic origin"²⁷.

Third, whereas traditional ISKCON rejected academic study as mere speculation and tended to restrict the term "knowledge" to its own "gnosis", contemporary ISKCON now utilizes descriptive models and academic categories to interpret its own thought. For example, Subhananda Das uses Max Weber's concept of "world-rejecting asceticism" in his description of ISKCON faith as a "dualistic, world-rejecting ideology"²⁸. And he readily admits not only that ISKCON religious life lends itself to analysis in terms of sociological and psychological categories but also that individual's motives for joining ISKCON are "almost always mixed"²⁹.

Finally, Subhananda Das claims that a comparison between the Catholic monastic tradition and the ISKCON ashram could be a fruitful topic for an initial dialogue. Specifics would include the ascetic lifestyle, the ideal of celibacy and the practice of prayer and meditation³⁰.

Despite these hopeful signs of a new openness on the part of ISKCON toward other religions, a major problem remains. In any dialogue with other religions, who speaks for ISKCON? On the one hand, Subhananda Das claims that ISKCON's magazine, *Back to Godhead*, is "an organ of official teaching"³¹. On the other hand, he admits that the views

expressed in ISKCON Review are the authors own and do not represent official ISKCON ideology. Further, he seems to question the very existence of "official views"³². Does this mean that ISKCON's traditional, exclusivist ideology is still the official view? If so, are the views of Subhananda Das and a handful of other ISKCON intellectuals truly representative of ISKCON?

While dialogue between individuals of different religions is always possible and often fruitful, it is apparent that any official dialogue with ISKCON as an institution will have to await the evolution of ISKCON ideology beyond its present stage of development. We can hope that the initiatives of Subhananda Das and others in ISKCON will prevail and make future dialogue possible.

Dept. of Religious Studies
Univ. of Arkansas, Little Rock

J. Frank Kenney

Foot Notes

- 1 J. Frank Kenney, "Dharma' and 'Tolerance' in Krishna Consciousness' *Proceedings of the 1982 Southwest Conference on Asian Studies*, 82-88
- 2 ISKCON is a new Hindu-American movement founded in New York in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.
- 3 Gustav Mensching, *Tolerance and Truth in Religion*, Univ. of Alabama Press, 1971, 12.
- 4 Subhananda Das, "The Catholic Church and the Hare Krishna Movement: An Invitation to Dialogue", *ISKCON Review*, Vol.2 ('86), 2.
- 5 John A. Saliba S. J., "Christian and Jewish Responses to ISKCON: Dialogue or Diatribe"?, *ib.*, 94.
- 6 There is no official, comprehensive ISKCON statement to date regarding its view of other religions. What follows has been pieced together primarily from statements in ISKCON's magazine, *Back to Godhead*.
- 7 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "In the Beginning Was the Word", *ib.* Vol. 10, No.1 ('74), 7.
- 8 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Hearing from The Source", *ib.*, Vol. 15, No 5 ('80), 4.
- 9 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "The Religion Beyond All Religions" *ib.*, Vol 16, No. 9 ('81) 3ff
- 10 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Perfect Knowledge for Human Society", *ib.* No. 66 ('74), 27.
- 11 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, *Bhagavadgita As It Is* (Abridged Edition), New York: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, '72, pp. xxviii, 68, 69, 123, 210.

- 12 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "The Human Struggle", *Back to Godhead*, No. 51 ('73), 5.
- 13 Rayarama Das Brahmachary, "The Official Electric-Globe Direction Finder", *ib.*, Vol. 1, No. 19 ('68), 12-15.
- 14 Hrdayananda dasa Gosvami, "Avoiding Wrong Turns on the Path of Knowledge", *ib.*, No.60 ('73), 24
- 15 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Krishna or Christ-The Name is the Same", *ib.*, Vol. 11, No. 3/4 ('76) 5
- 16 His Holiness Subala dasa Svami, 'Krishna Consciousness: The World Religion', *ib.*, No. 59 ('73),21.
- 17 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, 'Krishna or Christ-The Name is the Same' *ib.*, Vol 11, No 3/4 ('76), 4ff.
- 18 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, *Bhagavadgita As It Is*, 30
- 19 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, 'Krishna or Christ-The Name is the Same'. *Back to Godhead*, Vol. 11, No. 3/4 ('76), 4ff. 20 *ib.*, p. 4.
- 21 Bhavananda Goswami, 'You Are Not Following Your Teacher' *ib.*, Vol. 13, No. 10 ('78), 25ff.
- 22 Kirtanananda Swami, 'The Things That Christ Had to Keep Secret', *ib.*, Vol 12, No 12 ('77) 10ff
- 23 Bhavananda Goswami, 'You Are Not Following Your Teacher', *ib.*, Vol 13, No. 10 ('78), 27.
- 24 Kirtanananda Swami, 'The Things Christ Had to Keep Secret', *ib.* Vol 12, No. 12 ('77), 13,
- 25 Ravindrasvarupa Das, 'Patterns in ISKCON's Historical Self-Perception', in David G. Bromley and Larry D. Shinn (eds), *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, ('89) 55-75.
- 26 Subhananda Das 'The Catholic Church and the Hare Krishna Movement: An Invitation to Dialogue', *ISKCON REVIEW*, Vol. 2 ('86) 11
- 27 Ravindrasvarupa Das 'Patterns in ISKCON's Historical Self-Perception', in David G. Bromley and Larry D. Shinn, *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, 56.
- 28 Subhananda Das, 'Exploring an Alternative Reality: Spiritual Life in ISKCON', in David G. Bromley and Larry D. Shinn (eds.), *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, 143
- 29 *ibid.* 156
- 30 Subhananda Das, 'The Catholic Church and the Hare Krishna Movement: An Invitation to Dialogue', *ISKCON Review*, Vol. 2 (86) ; passim
- 31 Subhananda Das, 'Introducing ISKCON REVIEW', *ib.*, Vol 1, No. 1 (Spring, 85) , 2. 32 *ibid.*, 2.

Bhakti in the Religious Traditions of Tamilnadu

Introduction

Experience of the Ultimate Reality is the core of religion. This religious experience is here understood as one's relationship with the Supreme God. In this unique relationship the religious consciousness may be totally absorbed into the Divine in such a way that there can no more be any question of "I" and "Thou". The degree of intimacy is also expressed differently by way of explaining it as the unity of will and desire. The latter kind of relationship maintains a "twoness". Although the "twoness" is preserved, it is possible still to speak of a relation of love between the knower and the known. The "absorption" kind of union may be characterised as idealistic, speculative and impersonal. The *advaita* of Śaṅkarācārya can be taken as the supreme intellectual expression of this kind of unity between God and the soul. The two religious traditions of Southern India, namely, the Saiva and the Vaisnava traditions of Tamilnadu, have a different understanding of the soul's oneness with the Supreme. The nature of this kind of God-soul relationship, which is personally conceived, is beautifully expressed in the theologically and philosophically significant concept of *bhakti*. The theological importance is seen in conceiving *bhakti* as a fundamental divine attribute in relation to the worshipper and the worshipper's response to that Divine love.

Meaning of Bhakti

Philosophy has its beginning in wonder. The human being stands always with a sense of awe in the presence of God's mysterious creation and His incomprehensible divine providence. The sense of awe and wonder gradually develops into emotions of admiration, gratitude and reverence. The humans view the inexpressible delight in the works of God in nature and the humankind is filled with loving reverence for the Lord of Creation. *Bhakti* is a specific religious attitude and sentiment.

It is an attitude of establishing everlasting true love union with the personal God. In the long process of attaining union with God the seeker expresses all kinds of sentiments: sentiments of love, affection, longing, dependence, admiration, wonder, fear etc.

Bhakti is intense love for God and is a clinging of the heart to the Supreme Lord whose greatness the religious soul realizes through various ways. All *bhakti* schools hold the view that the Absolute cannot be reached by knowledge alone (*jñāna deva tu kaivalyam*) but takes *bhakti* as the essential and most efficacious means of attaining oneness with the Lord.

The word *bhakti*, etymologically derived from the Sanskrit root *bhaj*, has a variety of meanings like devotion, love, adoration, attachment, worship, loyalty, service and homage. '*Bhaj*' in the religious sense is used to mean approaching God for worship, adoration and love. *Bhakti*, as understood in the religious context, is *sa tasmin parama prema rūpa* — infinite love for God and it is *parānuraaktiśvare* — infinite attachment to God.

Bhakti tradition has scriptural foundations. The word *bhakti* is found for the first time in the *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad* (*Svet. Up.*)¹. Although it did not occur earlier than the *Svet. Up.*, the idea of love of God is already present in early Hindu Scriptures². The *Svet. Up.* teaches *bhakti* as trusting in the love of God. The object of devotion here is Rudra Siva. Although Rūdra Śiva is the most terrible god of the Hindu pantheon, he could be pleased by prayers and offerings. According to *Svet. Up.*, the best way to worship god is *bhakti*. To one who has the highest devotion (*bhakti*) for God, and for his spiritual *guru* even as for God, to him the revealed truths become manifest if he be a great soul. He is a great soul if he has *bhakti* to God and to his spiritual preceptor (*Svet. Up.* VI. 29). Chapter six of *Svet. Up.* needs special study in order to understand the trusting, loving, adoring and salvific nature of the *bhakti*.

The explicit teaching of *bhakti* as the way of salvation is found in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (BG). The BG teaches the salvific nature of true *bhakti*. Sri Krishna is the object of devotion and adoration here. In the BG Krishna calls Arjuna a *bhakta* if only Arjuna trusts Krishna's friendly discourses and becomes his loyal disciple. In IV. 11 Krishna declares that he loves his devotees with the same love with which the devotees

approach him. In the *BG bhakti* is the single-minded attachment to Krishna and it is total God-centredness. "Cast off all work on me" exhorts Krishna (*BG* III. 30); Do it (the work) as an offering to me" (IX. 27) and "He whose work is unto me, whose goal I am, my devotees free from attachment, void of enmity to any being, he comes to me" (XI.35). It is only through *bhakti* that one realizes the true nature of God. "By his loving devotion (*bhakti*) he comes to know me as I am." (XVIII.55) *Bhakti* as God-centredness is best expressed in *BG* XI.55: "Do works for me, make me your highest goal, be loyal-in-love to me, cut off all other attachments, have no hatred for any being at all: for all who do thus shall come to me." *Bhakti*, thus, is a loving attitude towards God; it is selfless attachment and total surrender to God; *bhakti* is God-centredness.

'Bhakti' in the Tamil Tradition

Bhakti, as understood in the preceding pages, has scriptural foundations and it is popularly articulated in Tamil literature and was practically lived out by the Tamil *bhakti* poets of the Vaisnava³ and Saiva⁴ traditions.

a. Sangam literature

The earliest Tamil literature produced during the first few centuries before and after the Christian era is known by the name *Sangam* literature. *Tōlkāpiyam* (c. a. 3rd B. C.), the grammatical exposition of Tamil language used in the time of *Saṅgam*, divided the subject matter (*poru!*) of both grammar and other literary works into *akam* (inner) and *puram* (outer). The *akam* poetic compositions represented romantic love between the sexes with all its feelings like emotional encounter between the lovers and incidents like infidelity, separation and then patient waiting for the final re-union. This love between the sexes with all its dominant features is aptly characterized as "interior landscape" (*akam* poetry)⁵. The distinguishing feature of its "interiority" is that it pertains to the "inner world" and speaks of something "non-objectifiable". This non-objectifiable, experiential component provides the basis for understanding the religious experience of the true *bhaktas* in the context of religion. The Alvars and the Nayanmars used this love imagery to convey their passionate longing for and intense devotion to Viṣṇu and Siva respectively. Love between the lover and the

beloved with its "emotions and incidents"⁶ is an appropriate symbol of the true path (*Sanmarga*).

b. Tirukkural and Tirumantiram

Tirukkural, a post-*Saṅgam* work, is well-known for its presentation of love and other lofty religious principles. Tiruvalluvar⁷, the author of *Tirukkural*, is a popular name in Tamilnadu and is known as "advaitic *ṛṣi* expounding an advaitic way of life"⁸. The goal of life according to *Tirukkural* is "reaching the feet of the incomparable God" (*Tirukkural*, I.7) and "clinging to the feet of the Lord" (*Tirukkural*, I. 4).⁹ Those are familiar expressions of the *bhaktas* in the Tamil religious traditions who have experienced intimate relation with their personal gods.

Tirumūlar⁹, the author of *Tirumantiram*, a work which has significantly influenced a number of scholars of the later period, says: "becoming Sivam is the end of *Siddhanta Siddhi*" (*śivamatal ciltanta cittiye*, TM., 1437). The path suggested for the realization of this goal is appropriate learning and practice of yoga: "Those who learned what to be learned and those who practised the true *yoga* gradually attain wisdom by meditation on self-knowledge and become free of impurity. Those who see "that truth" (*taṭparam*) are Saiva Siddhantins (TM., 1421). The "seeing" of truth as attaining the state of union with God is possible only through love (*anpu*). The term *bhakti* and *anpu* stand for deeper love relation between the *bhakta* (devotee) and God. Tirumular goes even so far as to identify Sivam and *anpu*: "The ignorant think that love and Sivam are two. They do not know that love is Sivam. After knowing that love is Sivam they abide in the love which is Sivam". (TM., 270). In the highest state of *bhakti*, the state reached through faithful practice of the spiritual disciplines (*sadhana*) of *carya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana* (TM., 1455), the devotee's heart is dissolved into love and he leaps into true knowledge and reaches final realization of God, and God takes abode in the devotee's love (TM., 275).

According to Tirumular, knowledge is integral part of *bhakti*. A *bhakta*'s knowledge of God will naturally lead to the knowledge of his own nature: "Those who know themselves are those who worship the feet of the Lord.

“Those who know themselves are those who walk in the way of righteousness. Those who know themselves are the philosophers who know the truth of Siva. To those who know themselves the Lord is kith and kin” (TM., 108). It is clear from this verse that *bhakti* is not a mere sentimental attitude or feeling, but it is deeper knowledge of the self. The true knowers of God are the knowers of themselves and this self-knowledge is a condition for being a true *bhakta*.

Tirumular conceives *bhakti* also as love. He views everything through the prism of love and his understanding of love is aptly summarised in the following verse: “Born in love, brought up in love, moving and resting in love, fed with the supreme ambrosia of love, the *Nandi* entered me as love” (TM., 1769).

c. The Alvars and Nayanmars

The Sangam works influenced the efflorescence of the Vaisnava and Saiva *bhakti* traditions in between the 6th and the 9th centuries A. D. resulting in the remarkable devotional hymns collectively known as the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* for the Vaisnava tradition and the *Tevaram* for the Saiva faith. In the devotional hymns of the Vaisnava Ālvars and the Saiva Nayanmars we see the monumental exposition of their religious experience. The religious hymns of the *Nalayira Prabandham*¹⁰ and the *Tevaram* are praises of the Lord in terms of ecstatic love, total submission and self-surrender. In all those hymns we see the saints’ delving into the knowledge of God and immersing in the contemplation of Him. This state of mind is apparent in Tirumalisai Alvar’s expression of his love for Viṣṇu: “Viṣṇu, who wields the sacred disc, will be cognizable only by those who, after having closed the narrow paths of the five senses, and sealed their doors, open the broad way of intelligence, lighting the lamp of wisdom and mellowing their bones with a heart melted by the intense heat of piety”¹¹. This is not a mere emotional expression. It is an invitation to broaden our reasoning faculties and grow in wisdom and love in order to “know” God. *Bhakti* is not mere sentimental attachment but is the kind of love directed and guided by reason and knowledge.

Although in the Tamil *Bhakti* tradition we get an impression that the *bhaktas* are perfect knowers of God and are in full possession of the Divine, they are humble and “wise” enough

in confessing their imperfect knowledge of God and the impossibility of defining God in a formula. The great Nammalvar in his *Tiruviruttam* (44) says: "Sages with wisdom won by virtuous toil/ Assert His colour, glorious beauty, name/ His form - are such and such. But all their toil/ Has measured not the greatness of my lord:/ Their wisdom's light is but a wretched lamp"¹². *Bhakti* here opens up the scope for further investigation and seeking the greatness and mysterious nature of God.

Bhakti in the Tamil tradition is also an ideal to be pursued by all devotees. According to the *Periyapurāṇam*¹³ everyone is free and entitled to pursue the *bhakti* ideal. *Bhakti*, as a path and as a goal (*sadhana* and *sadhya*), is open to all. This message of the *Periyapurāṇam* is reflected in the following observation: "However poor, insignificant and helpless a human being may be, nothing can prevent him from having an ideal. The meanest of the mean can rise to the highest spiritual level — in the life of devotion and love"¹⁴.

The Saiva saints' hymns are, as mentioned above, outward expressions of their love (*anpu*), devotion (*bhakti*) and God-realization. Saint Sambandhar's doctrine of love is found in the following verse: "You who long for spiritual enlightenment, if you sprinkle the flowers of love for our father at Arur, you will attain release. You who long for release from re-birth, if you remember to praise the holy One at Arur, you will become true *yogins*. You who long for release from misery, if you worship with golden fair flowers our friend in the beautiful abode of Arur, you will attain everlasting bliss". (1198-1200) *Bhakti*, as reflected in the above hymn, is a loving remembrance, an offering of flowers of devotion (*pattimalar*) and worship. It enables one to attain spiritual illumination (*citta telivu*), freedom from re-birth (*piraviy aruppu*) and everlasting bliss. *Bhakti* for Sambandhar is an efficacious means for liberation and it is also the essence of Vedas, it is knowledge itself. "Those who recite the sacred syllables with an outpouring of tears of love (*bhakti*), this loving recitation gives them life and guides them in the way of salvation and is the true essence of the four Vedas." (2246) As it is mentioned above, *bhakti* in the Tamil tradition is not a mere sentimental attachment. Although emotional and sentimental feelings are natural and legitimate in expressing one's love towards God, in true *bhakti* knowledge is essential and there-

fore *bhakti* has an intellectual aspect in it. The integration of meditation, contemplation and loving devotion in the hymns of Tamil *bhakti* poets is a proof for the intellectual dimension of Tamil *bhakti*.

Sundarar, another saint of the Saiva tradition, conceives *bhakti* as single-minded love toward God. It is constant remembrance of the loving presence of God (1859) and the reciprocal possession of God and His devotee (293, 1859). It is soul's union with God and is soul's "seeing" God with its spiritual eyes (11) and this unique relationship is possible only in higher knowledge which is effected through the grace of God. With God's grace on the *bhakta's* side he reaches God's feet in blissful union (1457). *Bhakti* here is a *darśan*. It is the "seeing" through one's spiritual eyes. This highest state of one's upward spiritual journey is effected only through God's benevolent grace and *bhaktas* at all times incessantly beseech for the gift of this grace in order to attain the saving knowledge of His mystery.

Our study of *Bhakti* in Tamil tradition will be incomplete without reference to the remarkably mystical and profoundly religious work of the *Tiruvācakam* by the last of the Tamil Saivite *bhakti* poets, Manikkavacakar. The *bhakti* writings of Vaisnavite Alvars and Saivite Nayanmars reached its climax in the *Tiruvacakam*. The sacred hymns of *Tiruvacakam* are daily sung with devotion and rapture in temples and homes throughout Tamilnadu. *Bhakti*, according to Manikkavacakar, is a free gift of God and is the path for becoming one with Siva: "To me, living with the ignorant, who did not know the path of *mukti*, He, hurling out the "old deeds", taught the path of love (*bhakti*). He, exterminating impurities from my mind, made me Śivam and took me for His own. The supreme Lord thus was so gracious to me." (*Tiruvacakam*, Ll. 1)

Perceiving *bhakti* as a free gift does not mean that the human soul has nothing to do or it is passive. The soul has to long for it and work for it: Give me grace that ceaseless love for you may abide in the inmost of my heart.. (5. 11). I cling to none but you ... if you who made me your own deny your grace, to whom shall I complain ... bid me come to you (28.1). You desire me and rule me by your grace... I desire nothing else

but intense love for you. If at all I desire a gift from you, it is your love (33. 6).

True inner *bhakti* is the way of salvation and it alone will liberate the soul from the fetters (*paśa*) which always bind the soul to selfishness. What God demands from the soul is total love which is the path of salvation. God demands total love; he demands my whole being (10. 13). There was in you desire for me, in me for you (5. 80).

The love union which Manikkavacakar highly praises as *bhakti* is a "dying", "dissolving" and "merging" of the human soul into the everlasting bliss of the Divine. "In God my body, soul, thought and mind were merged..." (12. 18) "My bliss, you did not dissolve my soul and do consume my life" (44. 3). In II. 11 Manikkavacakar says that in the loving union God destroyed the thought of "I" and "mine" (33. 5) and liberated me from the bondage.

Ramanuja's understanding of Bhakti

The annihilation of the *aham* ("I" consciousness) through loving devotion to God gives philosophical depth to the concept of *bhakti*. In the works of Ramanuja (11th century A.D.) we find philosophical depth and theological excellence for *bhakti*. It is the insights of the Alvars that provided the fertile soil out of which Ramanuja's teachings flourished all over Tamilnadu and in the Indian philosophical traditions. In him *bhakti* shines in all splendour of a great philosophical exposition.

He gave an intellectual exposition of *bhakti*. For him devotion is superior to the path of *jñāna*. In the *Vedartha Saṅgraha*, *bhakti* is described as a knowledge which consists in excessive adoration and attachment to the Ultimate Reality. It is a form of knowledge that fills the heart of the individual with attachment to supreme divinity. It is man's reaching out towards a fuller knowledge of God and it is through this knowledge that one will be freed from all evil which is incompatible with the attainment of God. Ramanuja characterized this knowledge as *rajnam vidya*, which is explained as *mahamanasam vidya* — knowledge of the kings, for they have a broad and profound mind. This knowledge expels all evils incompatible with the origination of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* pre-supposes, for Ramanuja, a thorough knowledge of Ultimate Reality. This *bhakti* is able to vanish all the defects

like ignorance etc. and makes the soul cognize the Divine. In short this knowledge is the means to arise *bhakti* in the mind of the devotee, and once *bhakti* is given rise in one's mind, the devotee experiences Him directly and He is approached as He really is.

A devotee, for Ramanuja, is the one who performs all acts like the studying Vedas, performing sacrifices etc. All his activities are directed to serve the only one purpose of attaining God. Then, he is God's devotee because he loves God so much that he performs all acts to the one end of the God-realization.

Bhakti, as loving God with all our mind and heart finds its culmination in the intuitive realization of God. This intuitive realization is the essence of all theological pursuits. In Ramanuja we see this realization of God as a progression of soul's journey from one stage to the other. It is a movement from *parabhakti* to *parajñāna* and finally leading to the culmination of *paramabhakti*. *Parabhakti* is the initial stage where the devotee has love for God which is inherent in the heart of man. In the *parajñana* stage the soul's relation to God becomes intimate and the devotee sees the worldly things as worthless in relation to the Divine goodness. *Paramabhakti* is the supreme devotion and through this uniquely intimate relationship with the Divine, the devotee is united with God. Here *bhakti* is a form of meditation where alone the *bhakta* 'sees' the Divine as It is. In *Śrī Bhāṣya* Rāmānuja says "meditation means steady remembrance ...uninterrupted like the flow of oil"¹⁵. Here we must remember that Ramanuja equalled *bhakti* with *dhyanā* and *upāsana* and in this 'reflective thinking' we find the rational aspect of the *bhakti*.

The above stages of the upward progression of soul's Divine-oriented-journey are organically related. So in every stage of *bhakti* we are perfectly ourselves and therefore we shall rightly say that for Ramanuja *bhakti* is salvation in becoming. Through *bhakti*, soul becomes more and more vividly conscious of its relation to God, until at last it surrenders (*prapatti*) itself to God. Essence of *prapatti* is the transfer of one's own spiritual longings, burdens and responsibilities to God in utter helplessness with devout prayer and infinite confidence in the might and mercy of the Lord. Hence it is aptly named *bhara-samarpana* — unloading the burden. *Bhakti* is an act of complete abandonment of the self to the care of God. The absolute Lord

is placed in total charge of one's life. In this state there is no longer any self-love or self-seeking in the *bhakta* for it is God who takes the place of self and what we see in the *bhakta* is a transfigured life.

Conclusion

In Tamil tradition the *bhakta* conceives everything as the manifestation of God's benevolent grace and He is the Lord of grace (*karuṇākara kaṭavul*). The saints of Tamilnadu used many metaphors in order to convey the blessedness and the out-pouring of that grace. For example, sometimes *taya* is used for grace and compares it to the compassion of a loving mother (*tāyinum nalla tayāluvē*)¹⁶. In the *bhakti* hymns of Tayumanavar (17th century A. D.) the attainment of the supreme state of union through grace is presented in a figurative way: "My Lord is the embodiment of love to his devotee. He is blissful Silence and gracious Master to His lovers. He crowned my head with His holy feet. Concomitantly I realized myself and had my mind die (my mind ceased thinking)". The divine grace (*tiruarul*) is figuratively presented in the above hymn as "He crowned my head with His feet" (*tan patam cenniyl vaittan*). The moment He placed the feet on the head of His devotee, the soul allowed its ego-mind to go dead and realized the Self. Both "dying" and "realization" happened concomitantly. This death of the mind (*manam tan irantaene*) refers to the dying of the self which is bound by ignorance. This breaking of the limiting conditions of the self ensures the soul its spiritual elevation which ultimately is possible only through divine grace (*tiruarul*).

Bhakti is soul's union with God and is soul's "seeing" God with spiritual eyes. In this sense *bhakti* is *darśanam* — intuitive realization of the Infinite. This is religious experience. In this experience the soul affirms that it is not different (*vēralen*) from God, and whatever the soul does is His act (*enatuṇceyal nīnatuṇceyal*). The *bhakta* (devotee) experiences the unique identity between his self and the Supreme Self. The true devotee realizes that neither his existence nor his actions are separable from the Divine. Expressions and descriptions of this inseparable nature of God-man relationship is replete in the hymns of the *bhakti* saints. In the ecstatic state of their love-realization, the saints used to reveal: 'my action is always Thy action.

The nature of my self does not exist apart from Thy nature'. It is the advaitic experience or the unitive experience where all religions can meet and all spiritualities shall converge for a meaningful co-existence of the humankind.

Dharmaram Vidya Ksetra
Bangalore - 560 029

Thomas Manninezhatt

Foot Notes

- 1 Bhandarkar in his work *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems* (p. 28) is of opinion that the origin of *bhakti* may be traced to the *Upanisadic* idea of *upasana* (meditation).
- 2 Cf. *Rig Veda*, I. 164. 33; I. 89.10; *Brih. Up.* IV. 4. 22.
- 3 The Vaisnava *bhakti* poets are known as the *Ālvars* who lived between the 7th and 9th centuries AD. Well known *Ālvars* are *Periyalvar*, *Tirumangai*, *Andal* and *Nammalvar*.
- 4 The Saiva *bhakti* poets are known as the *Nayanmars*. They also flourished in Tamilnadu between 7th and 9th centuries. Of the many *Nayanmars* the famous trio, namely *Sambandhar*, *Appar* and *Sundarar*, together with *Manikkavacagar* are well known all over Tamilnadu.
- 5 See A. K. Ramanujan, trans., *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems From A Classical Tamil Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1967).
- 6 M. Dhavamony, *Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 108
- 7 The time of *Tiruvalluvar* is not certain. A probable date is between 800 to 1000 A. D. cfr. G. U. Pope, trans., *Tirukkural* (Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1958).
- 8 Meenaksisundaram Pillai, *Advita in Tamil* (Madras: University of Madras, 1974), p. 6.
- 9 The date of *Tirumular* is an unsolved problem. Most of the Indian scholars place him between 6th and 8th century A. D. His work *Tirumantiram* is a three thousand verses Tamil manual which is accepted into the canonical collection of Saiva devotional (*bhakti*) works known as the *Tirumurai*.
- 10 It is the collection of hymns of the *Ālvars*. These Tamil hymns were gathered together by *Nathamuni* (c. a. 920 A. D., who also started the use of those hymns in the temple worship.
- 11 Srinivasa Aiyangar, *Tamil Studies* (Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982), p. 304
- 12 As translated by J. S. M. Hooper, *Hymns of the Ālvars* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 73
- 13 It is the collection of hymns of the Saiva teachers (*samayacaryas*) *Sambandar*, *Appar* and *Sundarar*. This is considered as the canonical work of the Saiva tradition.
- 14 Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973) p. 187
- 15 *SB*, I. I. 1
- 16 *Tayumanavar*, XLVI 15

Book Reviews

Michael C. Kirwen, *The Missionary and the Diviner*, Maryknoll NY, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. xxv, 134.

The book deals with a living issue in missiology, the relevance of primitive cultures and their practices for proclaiming the Good News. This is particularly relevant regarding the traditional African religious signs, symbols, thought forms and spirituality. In the past missionaries gave a negative answer to this question. But this negative attitude which tried to impose on every one the so called Christian culture of the West has in the long run proved to be counterproductive and is today seen to be what it truly is, pure cultural colonialism. In fact the big majority of those who received baptism in black Africa did not buy it and did not abandon many aspects of their traditional religious outlook. The values and traditions of African religions have continued to thrive both in urban and rural settings through ministry of diviners and elders and the performance of rituals and ceremonies of the traditional religion.

The basic problem is that the fundamental religious issues like the existence and nature of God, source and nature of evil, the role of the redeemer, the nature of the sacral community and salvation itself are proposed and answered by the people of Africa with suppositions and perspectives far different from those of Christian missionaries. So the language of faith itself is different. Father Kirwen is a Maryknoll missionary who has engaged in pastoral work among the Luo people in Tanzania since 1963 and he details the obstacles to indigenization of theology. The people discussed in the book are subsistence farmers in Tanzania and their cultures have no written traditions. Their wisdom is passed from generation to generation by storytelling, songs, initiation rituals and celebrations of all types from birth to death. Diviners are the moral analysts, the charismatic leaders, the functionary priests of the traditional religions.

The essential message of the book is that the stories and rituals and ministry of the diviners are not works of the devil but expressions of an authentic religious culture. So Christianity

in working to bring the message of Christ to all humanity should not destroy them but integrate them to the celebration of Christian faith. No religion can subsist without cultural expressions. Those who embrace Christian faith are not passive recipients but active and creative subjects of their own conversion. So they should be allowed to bring the wealth of their religious culture to the fullness of Christian celebration.

Father Kirwen through a series of exciting dialogues between a Christian missionary and an Africa diviner compares and challenges their views on fundamental questions like the meaning of God, family and community, sickness and healing, good and evil and our unity with the departed ancestors. What stands out in the book is the urgency of inculturation as a fundamental dimension of mission work.

Joseph Areeplackal CMI, *Spirit and Ministries, Perspectives of East and West*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1990, pp. ix, 350.

This is a study of the sacred ministry in the writings of two important theologians, one from the West, Yves Congar O. P, and the other from the East, John Zizioulas of the Greek Orthodox church. The book was originally presented as a doctoral dissertation at the Gregorian University, Rome. In the study Father Areeplackal brings out clearly the different theological approaches and perspectives of the Western and Eastern traditions.

The main thrust of Western theology on the Holy Orders as presented by Thomas Aquinas is christological. Taking over and developing an ancient liturgical and patristic tradition he says that the bishop is a mediator, representing the community as successor to the Apostles, and acting in the place of God to confer on others the mission to preach the Good News of Salvation. Acting in the place of Christ he is the spouse of the Church and image of Christ, priest, prophet and king. Congar realized that this Thomistic view of ministry especially in its neo-Thomistic version was entirely weighted towards juridical clarity and tended to be merely hierarchology. Areeplackal explains how Congar by his realization that the dignity of the human person consists in action rather than in an idea, sees the Church as a pneumatic and eschatological reality. So

he said that the Church should be presented neither as a perfect society nor as an unequal hierarchical society but as the Body of Christ inspired by the Spirit. In this way he takes over a good deal of Oriental pneumatology to explain sacred ministry. Since the Church is above all a charismatic gathering, every one of the faithful has a specific role to play in it and in communion with the others, so that together they form the organic unity of the ecclesia.

John Zizioulas, according to Areeplackal, is a committed Orthodox theologian and his christology, ecclesiology and eschatology are fundamentally pneumatological. But in discussing ministry basing himself on the biblical notion of the pre-eminence of Christ in everything he insists on the necessity of approaching the question from a christological standpoint: Christ instituted the various forms of ministry with the sole intention that through them the Church should reflect and actualize in the world his own ministry until the Parousia. Zizioulas calls this a christological mystique, though the pneumatic dimension is not omitted since Christ is present in the world only in and through the work of the Spirit.

Comparing the two authors Areeplackal says that though they agree "that there is no christology without pneumatology and no pneumatology without christology, their pneumatological understandings of ordained ministry cannot be equated in every respect" (p. 250): The basis for Congar is christology and for Zizioulas pneumatology. The reason for this divergence is the different ways they think of the relation of the Spirit to the person and mission of Christ, which is the radical divergence between Eastern and Western theologies of the Trinity of God. So for Congar the sequence in the economy of salvation is God-Christ-Spirit-Church while for Zizioulas starting from the notions of corporate personality and eschatology there is no such sequence: the reality of the church is joined to the being of Christ and of the Spirit without any priority in sequence of time.

The study is a good example of how Eastern and Western theologies complete each other while retaining their distinct historical identities.

J. B. Chethimattam

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